

2dartist

Issue 103 | July 2014

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103

43
pages of
tutorials
inside!

THE SECRETS OF 3D PAINTOVERS

Techniques for designing
compositions and
lighting scenarios



The art of
painting portraits



Transform
your line art

Even Mehl Amundsen shares
his process of turning line art
into a rendered illustration

Master
lighting
scenarios

Nacho Yagüe shares pro tips as
he demonstrates how to alter the
lighting of an existing scene

Serge
Birault

The legend reveals his pin-up
painting secrets in the making of
Alexandra Potter and Tentacle

Learn to paint mecha girls

Clonerh Kimura reveals top tips to add definition,
color and lighting effects to sci-fi characters



+plus

- 10 of the best digital images
- Sketching concepts
- Create custom photo brushes
- Paint fire and smoke
- and much more!

Editor's Letter



JESS SERJENT-TIPPING
Deputy Editor

Welcome to the July issue of 2dartist magazine!

It's never too late to follow your passion and forge a career in something that you love!

We are happy to be featuring work by two artists at exciting stages of their careers: Andy Walsh and Houston Sharp. Freelance digital artist, Andy tells us all about his transition into digital art, while freelance illustrator, Houston shares how he mastered his signature style for painting portraits.

On top of this, we have a wealth of tutorials with industry tips, tricks and invaluable advice for painting and designing concepts in Photoshop. Enjoy!

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Contributors



HOUSTON SHARP

Houston Sharp is currently an illustration student at Art Center College of Design. He works freelance when possible, creating both concept art and illustrations for the film, games and publishing industries.



ANDY WALSH

Andy Walsh is a freelance digital artist and architectural visualizer. He has had work published in several magazines and is currently working on his portfolio with a view to working in the entertainment industry.



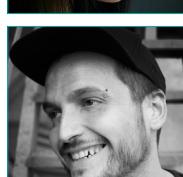
THOMAS SCHOLES

Thomas Scholes is a concept artist and visual developer who specializes in environments. Thomas enjoys life as a freelance artist and digital painting instructor with Futurepoly and Motivarti.



DONGLU YU

Donglu Yu is a senior concept artist working at Ubisoft Montreal. She has worked on game titles such as *Assassin's Creed Brotherhood*, *Assassin's Creed III*, *Assassin's Creed IV: Black Flag* and *Deus Ex: Human Revolution*.



NACHO YAGÜE

Nacho Yagüe is a concept artist in the videogame industry who has worked on projects such as *Splinter Cell: Blacklist* and the upcoming *Assassin's Creed Unity*. He currently works at Ubisoft Toronto (Canada).



EVEN MEHL AMUNDSEN

Even Mehl Amundsen is a freelance illustrator/concept artist from Norway. He previously worked for a number of clients while at Volta Studios, but has since recently started out on his own in Prague in the Czech Republic.



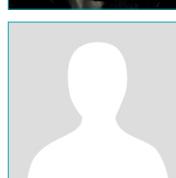
MARKUS LOVADINA

Malo is currently working as a senior concept artist, as well as a freelance concept artist/illustrator for the videogame and movie industry. He has worked for companies such as Acclaim Entertainment and Intel.



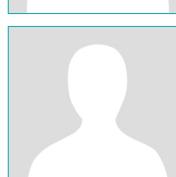
SERGE BIRAUT

Freelance illustrator Serge Birault is well known for his perfectly painted pin-ups. Since releasing his first Art Of book, he has been working on several images and won many new awards for his top-quality work.



CLONERH KIMURA

Clonerh Kimura is a freelance concept artist, character designer and occasional comic book colorist. He lives in Mexico City and has been working in the animation and videogame industry for the last six years.



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We are always looking for tutorial artists, gallery submissions, potential interviewees, writers and more. For more information, please send a link to your work to: jess@3dtotalcg.com.

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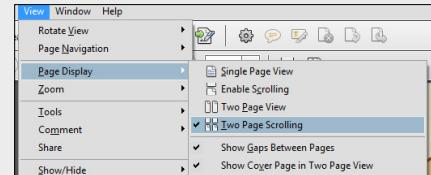
If you're having problems viewing the double-page spreads that we feature within this magazine, then follow this handy little guide on how to set up your PDF reader!

Top tips for viewing

For optimum viewing of the magazine, it is recommended that you have the latest version of Adobe Acrobat Reader installed. You can download it for free here: [DOWNLOAD](#)

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1. Open the magazine in Reader;
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3. Select **Two Page Scrolling**, making sure that **Show Cover Page in Two Page View** is also selected.



Jump to articles

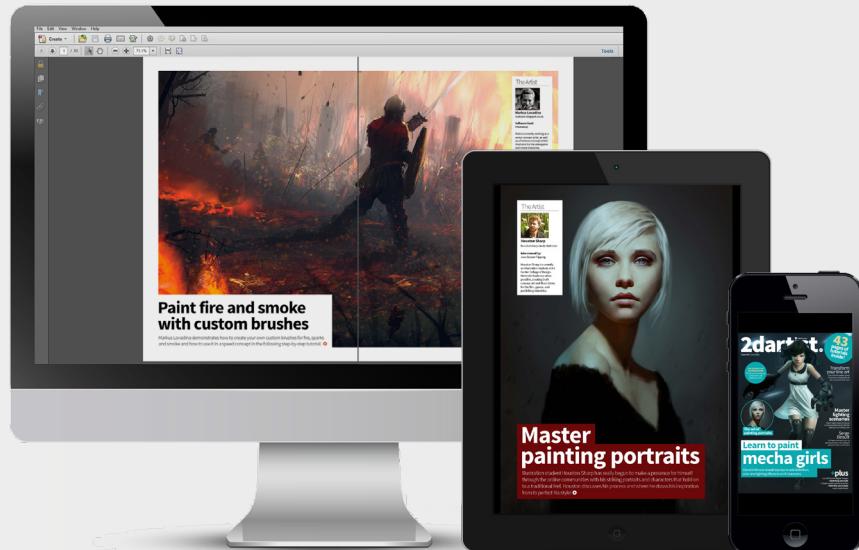
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Contents Issue 103

006 The art of painting portraits
Houston Sharp discusses his process for creating striking portraits and perfecting his style

016 The secrets of 3D paintovers
Andy Walsh divulges techniques for designing compositions and lighting scenarios

031 Sketching concepts
Thomas Scholes shares his sketchbook marked with exploration and concept designs

042 The gallery
Bobby Myers and Simon Fetscher feature in this issue's gallery selection of our top 10 images

062 Create custom photo brushes
Discover how to build up your scene using custom brushes and incorporating characters

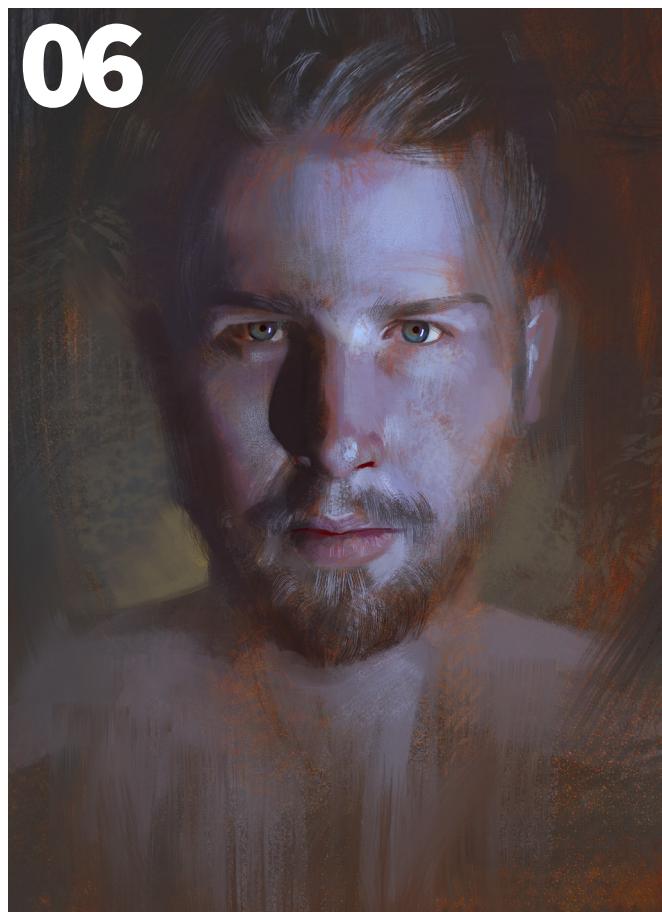
070 Master lighting scenarios
Nacho Yagüe shares pro tips as he demonstrates how to alter the lighting of an existing scene

080 Transform your line art
Even Mehl Amundsen shares his process of turning line art into a rendered illustration

090 Techniques for painting fire
Learn to create and use custom brushes to add fire to your concepts with Markus Lovadina

100 Learn to paint mecha girls
Clonerh Kimura reveals top tips to add definition, color and lighting effects to sci-fi characters

108 Digital Art Master: Serge Birault
The master of pin-up girls demonstrates how to paint his image *Alexandra Potter and Tentacle!*



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80



16



90



42

The Artist



Houston Sharp

houstonsharp.deviantart.com

Interviewed by:

Jess Serjent-Tipping

Houston Sharp is currently an illustration student at Art Center College of Design. He works freelance when possible, creating both concept art and illustrations for the film, games, and publishing industries.



The art of painting portraits

Illustration student Houston Sharp has really begun to make a presence for himself through the online communities with his striking portraits and characters that hold on to a traditional feel. Houston discusses his process and where he draws his inspiration from to perfect his style! 

Freelance Illustrator and concept artist, Houston Sharp started his journey into the world of digital art five years ago when he was 17-years-old. The discovery of digital speed painting tutorials on YouTube instantly grabbed his attention, and only a few days later he was the owner of his first Wacom tablet and a fresh copy of Photoshop. With a love of working with both traditional and digital mediums (albeit not usually both on the same piece), Houston loved the flexibility of working digitally to create a traditional feel in his images.

With a forte for painting portraits and characters he naturally landed his first publishing job supplying *Arts & Crafts Home* magazine with portrait paintings, and his career has continued

to grow with clients such as Applibot and Porcelain Film. We catch up with Houston to find out more about his process and the experiences he is having working on his first big-budget Hollywood film!

2dartist: What was it about the digital tools that made you want to pursue a career in the industry?

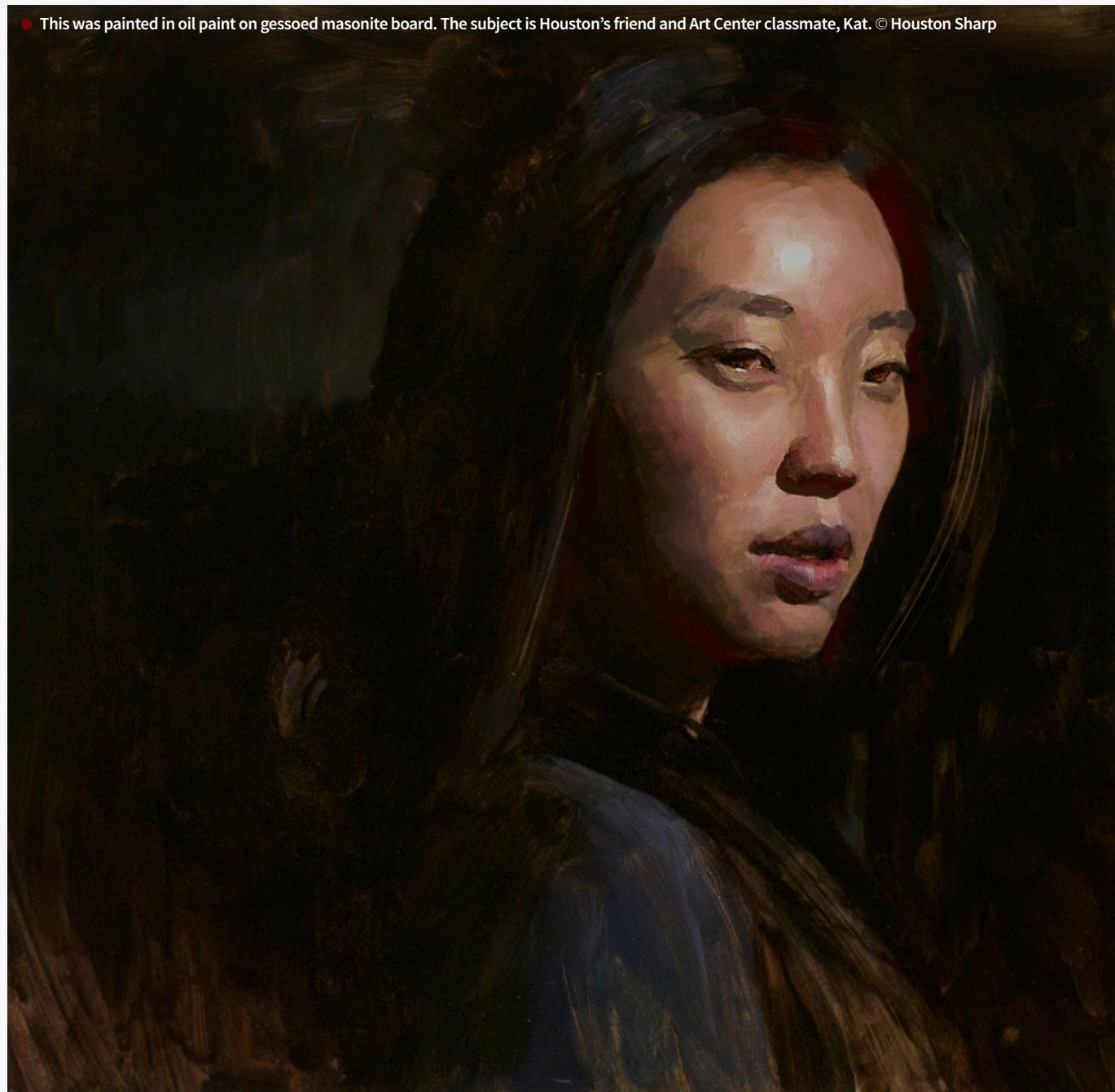
Houston Sharp: The fact that I could draw, paint, and experiment without ruining or wasting expensive materials was the biggest appeal to me. To this day, I still have a hard time getting over the fear of a blank page, as many artists do. Knowing that I could simply delete my layer and start again on a new one if I didn't like what I was doing kept my confidence at a good level, and kept me having fun while creating.

Another appeal of the digital tools was the versatility they provided me. I could create images that looked like oil paintings, charcoal drawings, airbrushed rendering... all while being completely editable, and all while avoiding the mess and hazards of traditional media. I was having so much fun playing with the tools, there was no question that I wanted to do this for a career.

2da: What is your biggest source of inspiration? Is there a particular style, mood or scene that you are drawn to?

HS: My tastes change pretty radically in short amounts of time; the answer I'm about to give would be totally different if I was answering it last year, and will probably be different a year from now. That ►

- This was painted in oil paint on gessoed masonite board. The subject is Houston's friend and Art Center classmate, Kat. © Houston Sharp





● A self-portrait, painted for Self Portrait Day. © Houston Sharp

being said, I am very inspired by artists that are able to retain a confident looseness to their work without sacrificing quality and readability. Richard Schmid's oil paintings, Craig Mullins' digital paintings, and Iain McCaig's drawings are three prime examples of this masterful ability (and three of my biggest inspirations at this point in time). Not only does this approach show considerable skill and confidence, it also shows that they are truly having fun when they are creating.

I also love paintings that have a deep narrative quality to them; images that prompt the viewer to wonder about what has happened in the scene, what is happening, and what will happen. That viewer-engagement factor is a wonderful quality to have in a painting.

2da: Could you choose one of your favorite past images (that you've created) and explain a little about its creation, and why it's your favorite?

HS: If I had to choose one at this point in time, I'd choose the digital portrait of my friend Kat. I had just finished an oil painting of her and I wanted to attempt to recreate the methods I learned in the oil painting into my digital process. So I figured I'd paint her again, since her features, the color palette, and the lighting were still fresh in my mind.

The digital painting flowed more naturally than any other one I had done before, and I was able to effectively achieve the look I wanted. I wasn't thinking too much while painting it; I was confident and simply having fun. It was completed in only three hours, approximately. The painting is one of my favorites because of the experience of the painting process, rather than the final result itself.

2da: Do you have any favorite software, techniques or processes that you apply to your artwork, that you would consider your signature style?

HS: Something I would consider as part of my signature style is my approach of keeping my digital work as traditional as possible. How I execute a digital painting is almost identical to how I would execute a traditional painting. Starting with a toned canvas to work my underpainting on, massing my lights and darks, and building up the forms from there is the general way in which I work. This is not exclusive to me of course, but it does help to define who I am and what I like as an artist. ▶

⚡ PRO TIPS

Slow down!

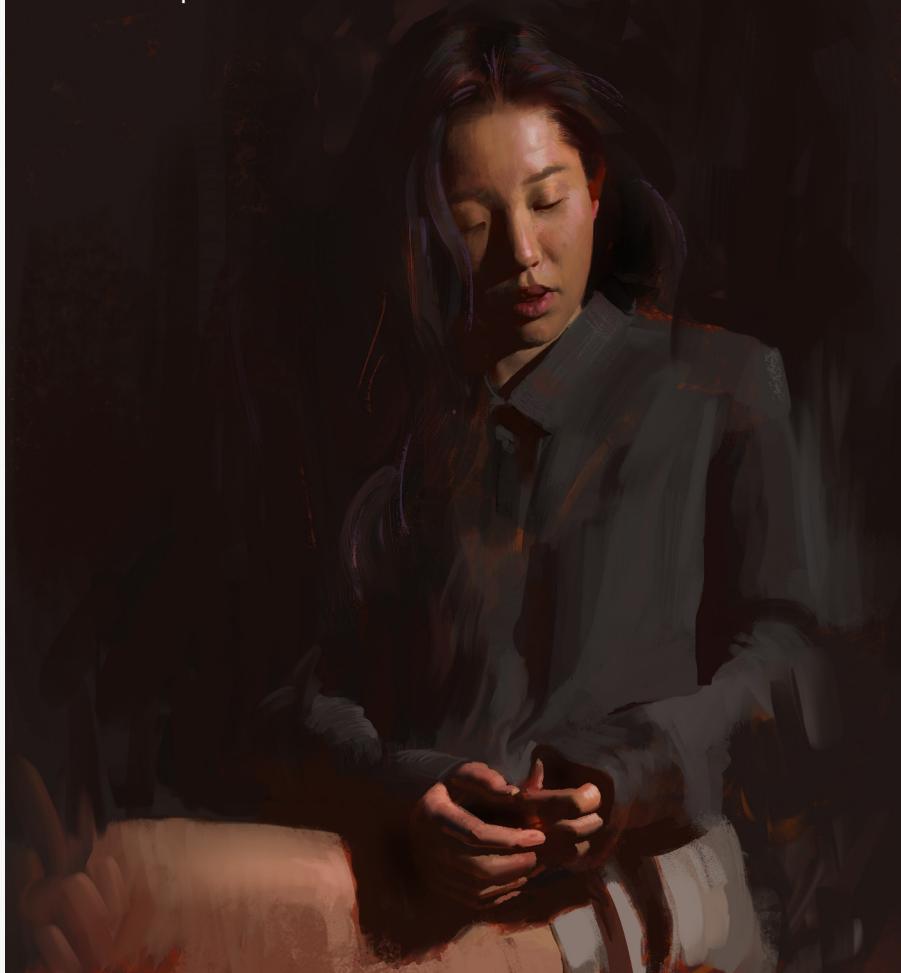
With digital tools and social media, there is a lot of pressure on novices to be fast, especially seeing everyone online posting 'speed paintings'. If you want to get good and fast, slow down, focus, and take time to really understand whatever it is that you are studying or practicing. If you don't, you risk making the same mistakes over and over again. You may get faster by only focusing on speed, but your work won't get much better. I know it sounds strange, but the more you slow down, the faster you will become. It's as simple as that.

Live and breathe art

Drawing and painting are skills that need to be developed. They are not like learning how to ride a bicycle - if you don't continually practice, you will lose your ability. Do whatever you have to in order to put in the time every day to practice your craft. Whether that means carrying a sketchbook and some pens with you wherever you go, or setting aside certain times of the day to practice, be diligent in any way that is fun for you to prevent yourself from getting rusty.

● This digital painting of Kat was created after Houston had completed the oil painting, in order to practice the traditional techniques he had learned while painting the oil portrait.

© Houston Sharp



⌚ Artist Timeline

Houston's career up to this point

2009: Discovered digital art, bought first tablet

2012: Began illustration courses at Art Center College of Design after high school

2012: First publishing job: Portrait paintings for *Arts & Crafts Home* magazine

2013: Created illustrations for Applibot's *Legend of the Cryptids* game

2014: First film job: Porcelain Film's third feature as a keyframe illustrator

2014: First big-budget Hollywood film job as a character designer/keyframe illustrator

“I plan to start doing 3D work soon. The more skills a concept artist has, the more valuable he or she is in the industry, and 3D work has become more prominent in the concept art realm over the last couple of years”



This was painted on-location atop the hill that the Art Center is located, in Pasadena, California. © Houston Sharp



- Another plein-air painting (a plein-air painting is a landscape painting that is created while on-location, the subject matter of which is whatever you see in front of you). © Houston Sharp

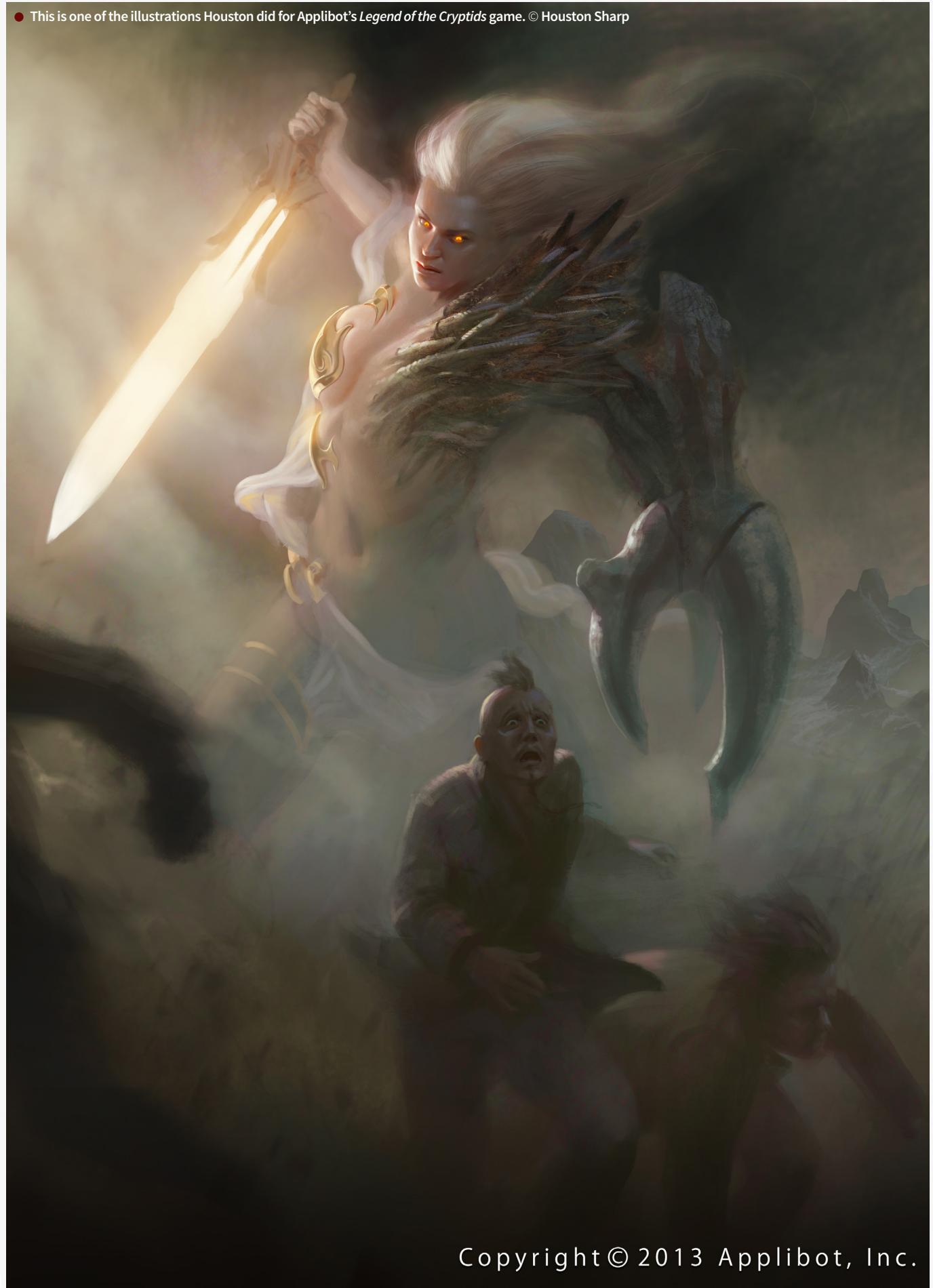




● This one might look familiar to avid 2dartist magazine readers. This was the result of a portrait tutorial created for 2dartist's May issue. © Houston Sharp



● This is one of the illustrations Houston did for Applibot's *Legend of the Cryptids* game. © Houston Sharp



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2da: Are there any areas in the digital art world that you'd like to branch into (and why)?

HS: I plan to start doing 3D work soon. The more skills a concept artist has, the more valuable he or she is in the industry, and 3D work has become more prominent in the concept art realm over the last couple of years. I think I would be doing harm to myself if I do not take the time to learn that skill, so it's on my to-do list.

Characters and figures are kind of my forte, so another goal of mine is to get comfortable in all other areas of concept art. Environment design, vehicle design, prop design, creature design, and mechanical design are all areas that I want to become proficient in.

2da: Do you ever practice CG/digital arts as a hobby and experiment with techniques and tools in your own personal artwork? If not, how else do you spend your free time away from the demands and deadlines of the creative industry?

HS: I totally practice digital art as a hobby. When on a job, it's typically not wise to experiment too much, because deadlines are usually too strict to allow time for recovery if a piece is ruined from failed experimentation. Experimentation is best suited to personal work, where there are no consequences for mistakes or bad results.

In addition to spending free time practicing digital art, I also spend it practicing traditional art (oil painting, life drawing, sketching for fun). And to fuel my inspiration, I like to spend time watching movies, playing games, and reading artbooks and novels. I also occasionally practice music; guitar and piano being my two go-to instruments. Everything I do winds up coming back to the creative industry in some way; there's no escaping it once you are in the right mindset.

2da: What has been your favorite commission/project to work on so far and why?

HS: You're going to hate this answer, so I apologize in advance. My favorite project so far is a film job I'm currently working on that I can't talk about in detail at this point in time. Just remember this interview a couple years from now when the movie comes out, ha ha!

The reason that it's my favorite is because it is the first big-name Hollywood movie that I've contributed to, and it has forced me to push my boundaries as an artist and a designer. I'm also working for someone on this project that I've looked up to for a very long time, so it has been a gratifying experience to have a 'back-and-forth' with him over the design process.



PRO TIP

Challenge yourself

Being cautious and playing it safe limits creative growth. As you are probably well aware, being stuck in a rut can be the worst thing for a creative person. Therefore, it is beneficial to step outside of your comfort zone every once in a while and try something you are not comfortable with. Try a new technical process to your painting, use tools you've never used before, paint different subject matter, even try a new style altogether. Keeping things fresh and new will keep you on your toes, and more apt to be creative and think critically.

Once again, I apologize for not being able to say more than that.

2da: If you could give future digital artists just one piece of advice on working in the industry, what would it be?

HS: Use your time wisely. I'm somewhat of a hypocrite for giving this piece of advice, since I sometimes struggle with it, but that shouldn't devalue how important it is in the creative industry. Having deadlines is stressful, but it allows for a precise and scheduled means of time-management. After you have done a few jobs, you will be able to estimate how long it will take you to do certain tasks, such as research, drawing, planning, and final execution. Keep this in mind when breaking up your time and planning, and give yourself enough time where it is needed.

Don't neglect time spent on research and planning either; they are just as important (if not more important) than painting the final. If you distribute your time effectively, you will not be as stressed while the intimidating deadline looms on the horizon, and

therefore your creativity will be given more room to be uninhibited.

2da: Finally, what can we expect to see from you in the future?

HS: You can expect to see character designs and illustrations from the movie I was so vague about a couple of questions back! In addition to that, I am working with author Sean Culey on a big Kickstarter book project, so you can expect to see illustrations for that soon.

Also, I am working on writing a couple of my own stories that I will begin doing visual development work for in the future. I haven't had time to work on them recently, but making public news about it and making people expect them should get me to work on them more diligently. Other than that, it's safe to assume that the future will be filled with many more portrait paintings as well! ●

The Artist



Andy Walsh

stayinwonderland.com

Interviewed by:

Jess Serjent-Tipping

Andy Walsh is a freelance digital artist and architectural visualizer. He is currently working on his portfolio with a view to working in the entertainment industry.

The secrets of 3D paintovers

Having started his career as a graphic designer, Andy Walsh shares his interesting route into becoming a digital artist, as well as divulging in his favorite techniques, including using 3D bases for achieving flowing compositions and perfect lighting scenarios





Andy Walsh's digital arts journey all started back in 1999, before he even owned a PC, and when he was writing his college assignments on an electronic typewriter. A friend introduced him to 3ds Max and Photoshop, and with his mind blown by the vast potential there was for working in both 2D and 3D, he knew now was the time to go digital!

Andy continued to dip his toes into the world of digital art as he was earning a living as a graphic designer (and hating every minute). With a published piece here and there, Andy felt he wasn't making significant progress breaking into the industry, so in 2011, he made the decision to quit his job as a graphic designer and throw himself into becoming a professional artist full time... or die trying.

Andy has continued to have his work published in several magazines and in 3dtotal's upcoming title *Digital Painting Techniques Vol. 6*, and is getting ever closer to his childhood dream. Andy shares his continuing journey into the industry, as well as his techniques and process of utilizing the power of 3D and 2D software!

2dartist: What was it about digital tools that made you want to pursue a career in the industry? And why did you decide to move away from the graphic design side of things?

Andy Walsh: Graphic design always felt very corporate and, if I'm honest, meaningless. I could see it being rewarding if it were a kind of graphic art for comic books or something else fun (for example I used to work for a book publishing division of Games Workshop which I enjoyed and felt like I was contributing towards an entertaining literary experience) – but stationery, flyers, and complement slips? Yuck.

You always have to ask yourself, is this what you dreamed you'd do when you were a child? Or even in high school? How many unhappy office workers took lofty subjects in school only to drop them in favor of something a little more practical that they later ended up hating?

In terms of digital tools, I always felt frustrated with traditional art as a kid, it just wasn't quick enough for my impatience. Simply put, the basic building blocks

"What influences me most is childhood magic. I grew up the 1980s and without wanting to sound old and cynical, that decade defined the magical era of movie entertainment"

of digital software: layers, the undo function, non-destructive aspects, allowed me to do something I never could before – experiment! Now I press the undo key a thousand times a day. Fantastic!

2da: Where do you draw your inspiration from? What influences your work and motivates you?

AW: What influences me most is childhood magic. I grew up the 1980s and without wanting to sound old and cynical, that decade defined the magical era of movie entertainment, which then went on to be misunderstood by Hollywood movie moguls and now we have much of that magic destroyed via movies that primarily make profit. I long to find that cinematic magic again, and inject it into creative projects with other like-minded artists.

As an exception to the above, the *Harry Potter* movies played a major role in my deciding to pursue a career in the entertainment industry. Those movies are riddled with childhood wonder and magic and it shows in the art, the cast, the production, the writing, the set design – everything! So what keeps me motivated is the idea that I could be part of a cinematic experience like that some day.

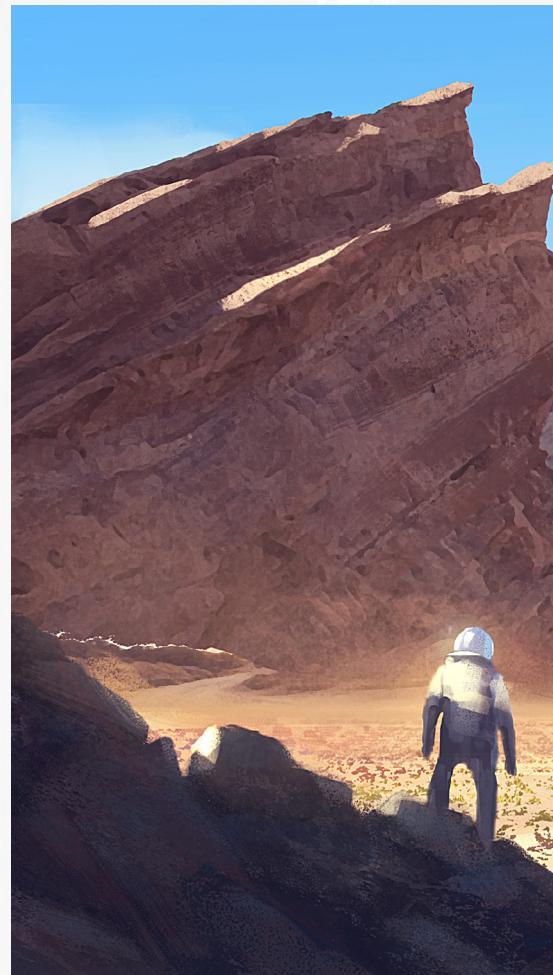
2da: Could you choose one of your favorite past images (that you've created) and explain a little about its creation, and why it's your favorite?

AW: The above painting was one of my greatest artistic struggles. A few years ago I had created a retro sci-fi piece and wanted to prove how far I'd come by doing another painting in the same theme but much better. So I spent a week trying to paint rocky mountains in the background without using any photographs or paint-over techniques. I wanted to make it consist of only digital paint. By the time I finished I had some pretty awful background rocks and the piece was festering in my portfolio.

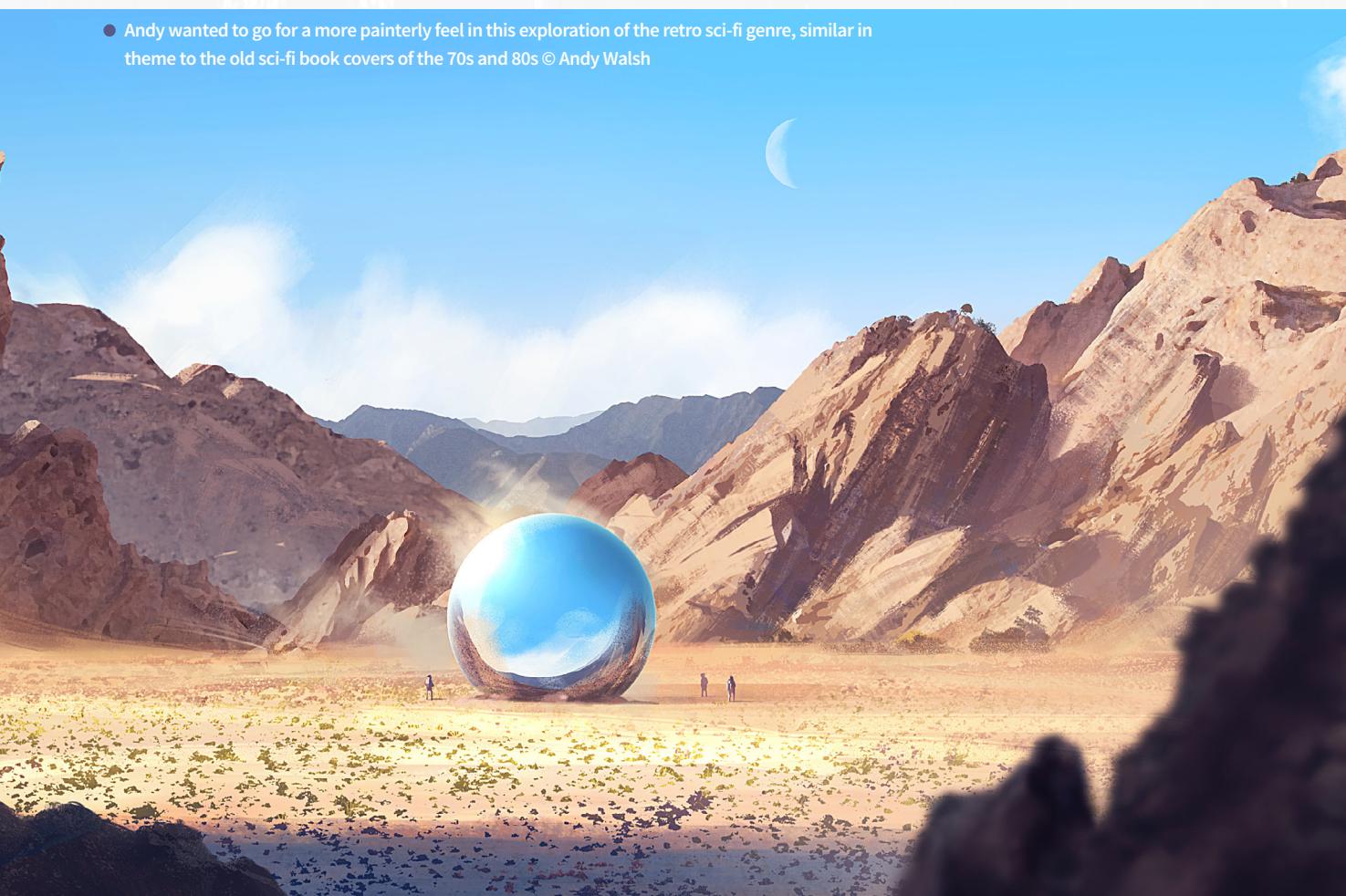
So I reluctantly decided to revisit it, and this time allowed myself to place photos and use a sort of loose matte painting technique to keep it realistic yet painterly. I was quite pleased with the result and posted it online. It went from being a piece I didn't really like to winning a Daily Deviant award and receiving praise from two well-known digital artists. Never settle for second best.

At first I wanted to prove that I didn't have to use photos but as you can see, it still has a painterly look and I did have to adjust the rocks to make the lighting cohesive. Besides, detailed rocks are horribly tricky to create from scratch!

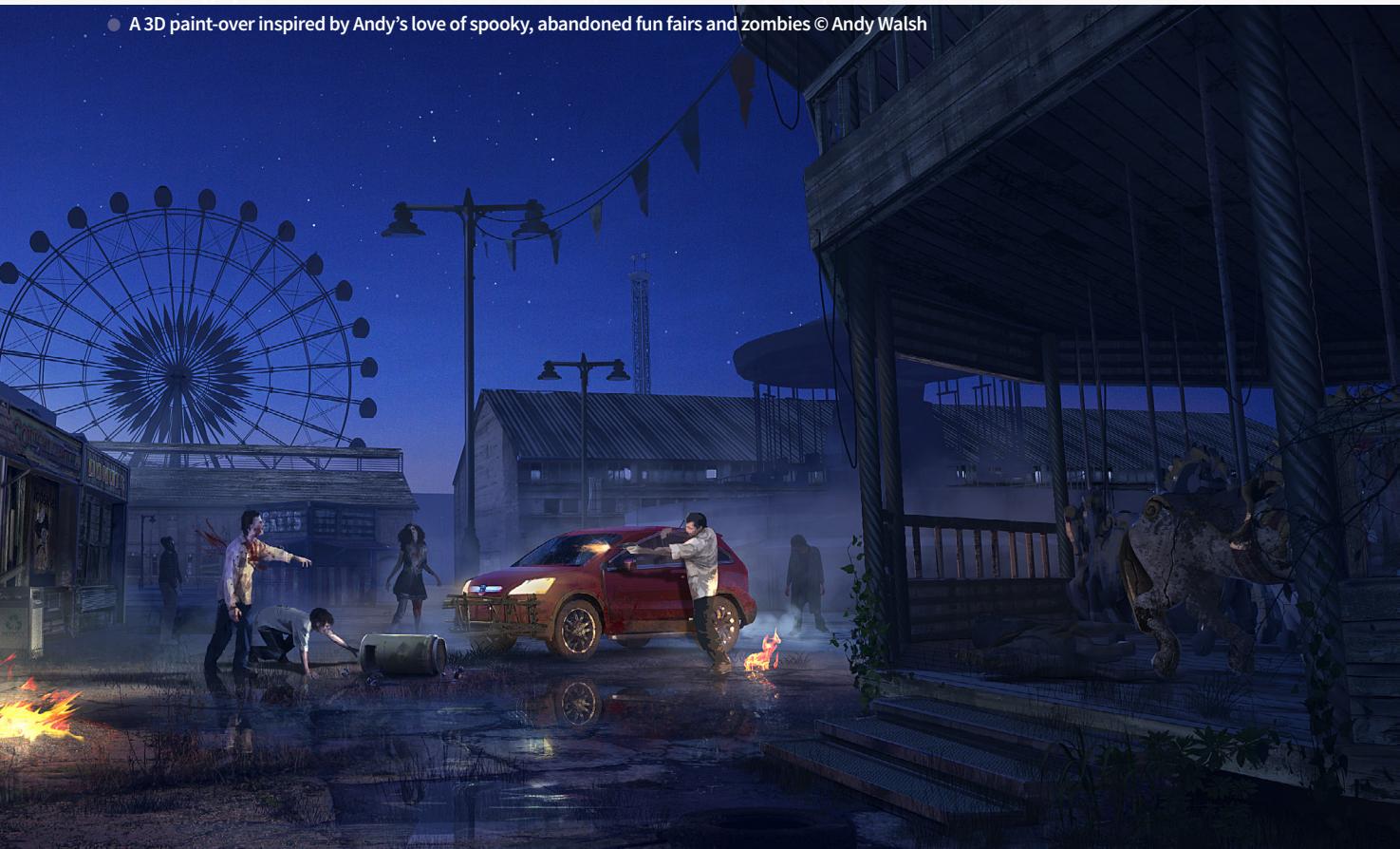
2da: Do you have any favorite software, techniques or processes that you apply to your artwork, that you would consider your signature style? ►



- Andy wanted to go for a more painterly feel in this exploration of the retro sci-fi genre, similar in theme to the old sci-fi book covers of the 70s and 80s © Andy Walsh



- A 3D paint-over inspired by Andy's love of spooky, abandoned fun fairs and zombies © Andy Walsh



- Photo-bash comprised of rock photos with some painting in Photoshop © Andy Walsh



⌚ Artist history

Andy Walsh's career up to this point...

March 2012: 3D Visualization Pro of the Week,
www.cgarchitect.com

June 2013: Published in *3D World* magazine

October 2013: Published in *3D Artist* magazine

September 2014: Published in *3D Artist* magazine





● This was made as a loose study of a tree © Andy Walsh

AW: I think, looking at my portfolio, I've been doing an awful lot of 3D paint-overs. I can work out compositions quite well this way, by placing buildings and shifting around the camera until I get something I like. I can also play with lighting scenarios and solve all that right away, saving time that I would have otherwise spent just doing it from scratch in Photoshop.

3D is pretty useful for an environment concept artist. The drawback is that it can look very fake and very crisp – not at all natural. So as I've gone on to do more of these, I do less detail in 3D and more in the Photoshop stages. You have to mess up those perfect edges where possible, especially if it's a period piece where a building wouldn't be rigid and clean.

I would actually like to spend way more time in Photoshop and get away from 3D for a while. Just keep things loose and painterly.

2da: You specialized as a graphic designer before getting more into concept art, are there any other areas in the digital art world that you'd like to branch into (and why)?

AW: There's a couple of things I'd like to do and I'd do either depending on which opportunities came up.

I'd like to do some matte painting as it's just a stone's throw away from what I already do. It's working directly with film and so has some potential for being quite exciting. The only issue is that it's way more technical than just editing some photos together. I don't want to get into the compositing aspects as that's even more technical but seeing my work on the big screen would be fantastic!

I also long to get involved with the likes of Disney, DreamWorks, Pixar, and so on, most likely as a visual development artist. A lot of my work is quite dark and eerie, so this would be a refreshing change. Some of the best artists in the industry work for the big animation studios.

2da: Do you ever practice CG/digital arts as a hobby and experiment with techniques and tools in your own personal artwork? If not, how else do you spend your free time away from the demands and deadlines of the creative industry?

AW: As I'm yet to fully break in to the industry, pretty much everything I do is practice work, with a direct aspiration to turning it into a full-time career. I once dropped everything I was doing for a solid week to learn the basics of ZBrush. That gave me some interesting ideas and I may return to that

occasionally. I recently got into writing and started to really study the craft. I hope to combine art and writing some day to produce some kind of graphic novel. Just have to focus on one career at a time!

2da: What would be your perfect project to work on?

AW: As I said before, my biggest recent influences are the *Harry Potter* movies. It actually breaks my heart, on a regular basis, that I was never part of those movies. If only one tiny piece of me was involved I could die happy!

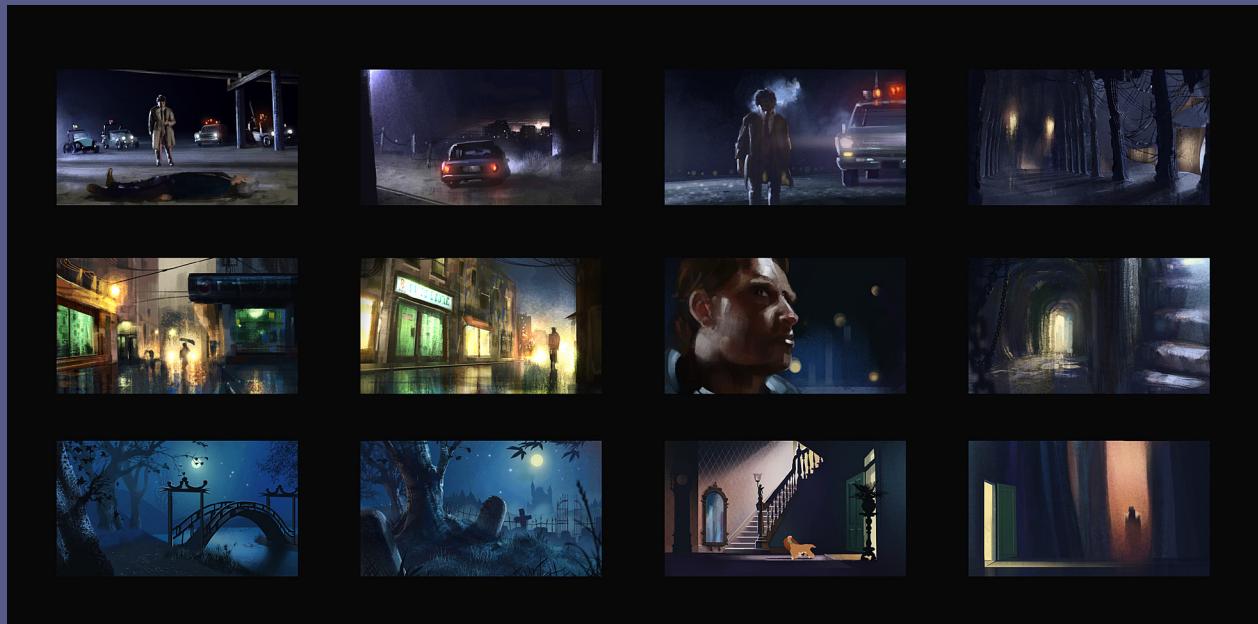
So my lifelong dream is twofold: to plant my feet firmly in the entertainment industry, and to work on a project such as *Harry Potter* that brings so much joy to kids and people of all ages. Life can be pretty tough at times and these stories give us a window into our deepest dreams, taking us away from it all.

I went to the *Harry Potter* studio tour a couple of years ago. A tour guide opens these big doors – I didn't know what was behind them, maybe just a big movie studio with props? And the Great Hall itself opens up before me. I immediately got a lump in my throat and had to keep myself together. That's what great art and great movie magic can do. ▶

⚡ PRO TIP

Thumbnail studies

To learn to paint from imagination and increase your mental image library, I recommend doing a sheet of thumbnails like these on a regular basis. You first do several photo studies on a theme (in this case they're sort of night shots) and then do several paintings from imagination based on what you learned in each. You'd be surprised how quickly you can improve!



● Learn to paint from imagination by doing lots of quick studies and then applying what you've learned



● This was inspired partly by *The Goonies* movie © Andy Walsh





Andy created this fun piece for Halloween, experimenting with a traditional animation feel © Andy Walsh





- Andy mainly used 3D for this image, though he mentions that it includes a photo of his good lady © Andy Walsh

2da: If you could give future digital artists one piece of useful advice on working in the industry, what would it be?

AW: I can really only advise on how to get better. Firstly, abandon all hope of expedience. This is going to take ages, but what else are you going to do? Give up and do something you hate? That time is going to pass anyway.

Secondly, if you keep doing whatever you can to improve, you'll constantly surprise yourself (sometimes alarmingly) on the quality of art work you're producing compared to six months ago or a year ago. This year I started turning down paid work to get better. Six months ago you wouldn't have recognized my portfolio. I feel like I have a long way to go but also feel that it could be any day now that I take a major step forward in my career.

2da: Finally, what can we expect to see from you in the future?

AW: Well, I'm being published in *Digital Painting Techniques* later this year which is great because some of my favorite digital artists were in the last edition, artists such as Shaddy Safadi, Donglu Yu and Marciej Kuciara.

Apart from that, expect more environment designs of a weird and (most likely) dark nature! ●



- Featuring in *2dartist* magazine. Made from a photograph Andy took near the docks in Liverpool © Andy Walsh

PRO TIPS

Avoid using black

There will always be exceptions to this rule (and any other art rule) but I feel that new digital artists, just getting to grips with the basics, should temporarily place a ban on using black as a means to place objects in shadow. I'm part of a large online community of artists whereby a lot of novices post their work for feedback and every single piece seems to be using black for shadows, and I might add, white for highlights. Just because something isn't in direct light doesn't mean that it's not picking up other colors from the environment! Try adding some color to shadows and reflections and see what happens.

Coping with discouragement

You ideally need a bit of time under your belt to feel the full implications of this, but to avoid getting discouraged, try to compare key portfolio pieces at six to twelve month intervals. If you can see a solid progression, you can barely imagine where you'll be a few years from now. Let alone five or ten!

All the artists out there, no matter how amazing, could show you early work that would make you grimace. Try to find video interviews with them where they show a few pieces, or find some good artists on www.deviantart.com who keep their earliest stuff (I certainly don't!) All great pieces of art stand on a foundation of failed attempts.



Andy created this mood comparison of a spooky old gas station with both 3D and Photoshop © Andy Walsh



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THOMAS SCHOLES

Sketchbook

Thomas Scholes opens up the fascinating pages of his sketchbook which are marked with exploration and designs. He also shares an insight into his techniques and inspirations to keep sketching those concepts!

The Artist



Thomas Scholes
artofscholes.com

Thomas Scholes is a concept artist who specializes in environments. He has worked on seven different titles for three different companies; including Disney Interactive's Avalanche. Thomas enjoys life as a freelance artist and digital painting instructor with Futurepoly and Motivarti.

SKETCHBOOK OF THOMAS SCHOLES

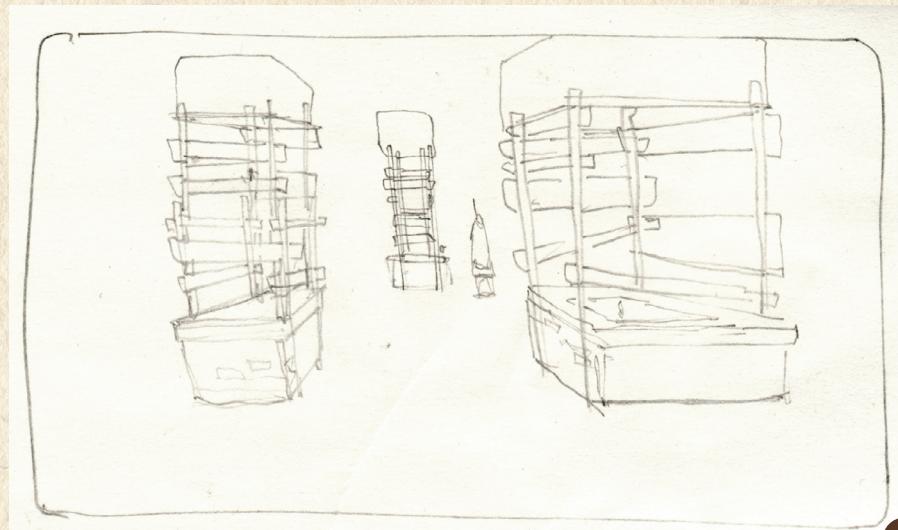
Discover the concept designs and abstract sketches of Thomas Scholes...

The act of consistently pulling a unique vision from the ether, no matter how rewarding, can still sometimes be an exhausting one. As a concept artist this is our task day in and day out, and for me sketching is a bit of a welcome release, one that I often light-heartedly refer to as therapy.

Sketching is like a safe haven that I can retreat to where there is no brief, no deadlines, no revisions and no expectations. Often free even of my own desires and expectations, these sketches are created simply because of my desire to create. They are the purest form of my pursuit of a journey where the destination is inconsequential.

Sketching techniques

Many sketches start simply with a mark, any mark will do. From this mark an image will evolve organically, reacting to its neighbors and the whole. Others are more abstract, subtle explorations of simple subjects and the fundamentals of design. Some are explorations in maximum efficiency of line, stroke and shape.



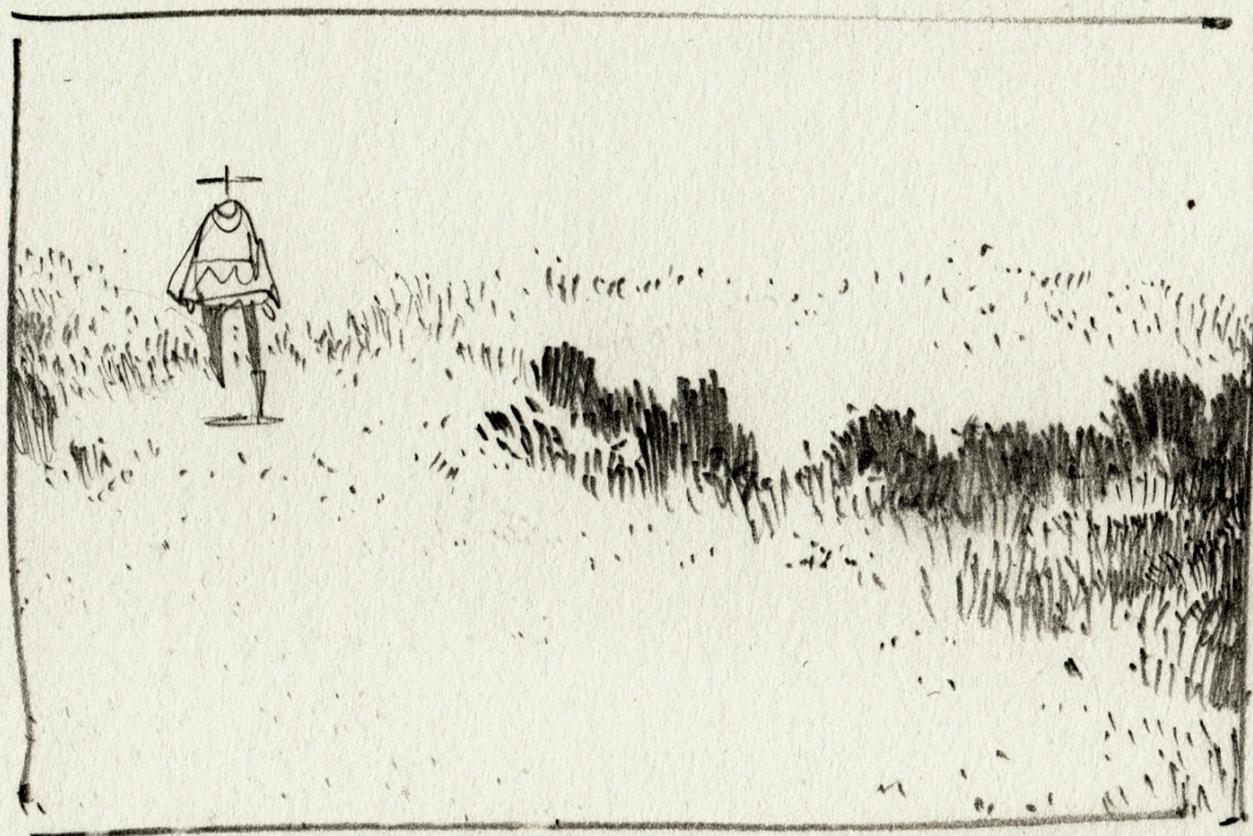
01

Most are predominately directed by composition and only a select few will start with questions seeking answers.

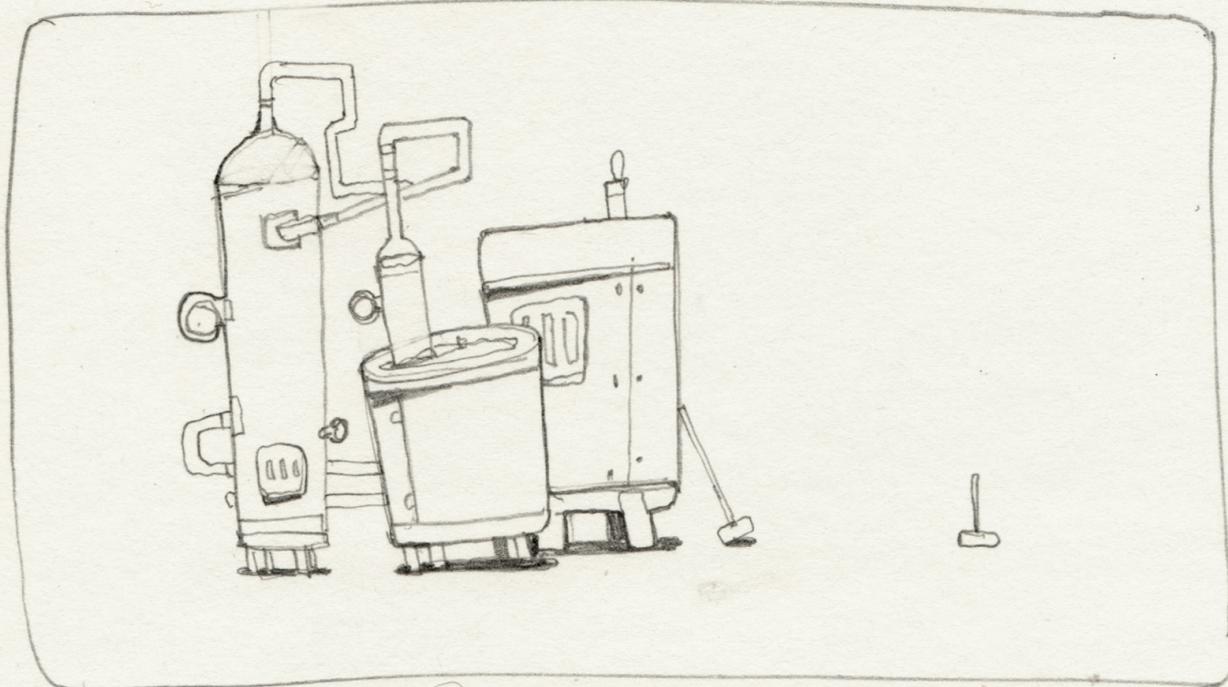
Borders are utilized to serve as parameters for composition, allowing for accurate judgment of each element's relation to another. At times their individual qualities can direct an image's progression and without them cohesion is lost.

It's not often that these sketches find new life as paintings, as their intent was never as such.

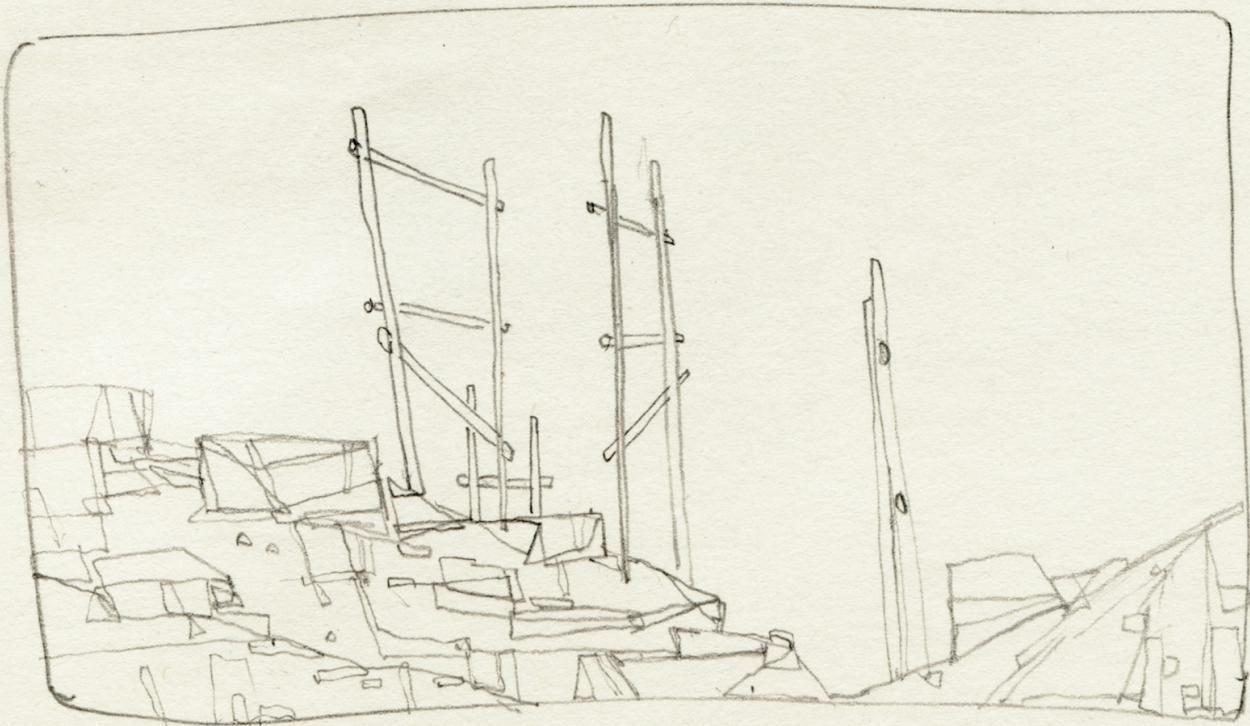
However, occasionally I will sketch in preparation for an illustration, but this will generally take the form of crude shorthand, like mental notes.



02



03



04

01 A sketch concerning spatial and diminutive rhythm, and an example of an early exercise in my recent re-focusing on perspective.

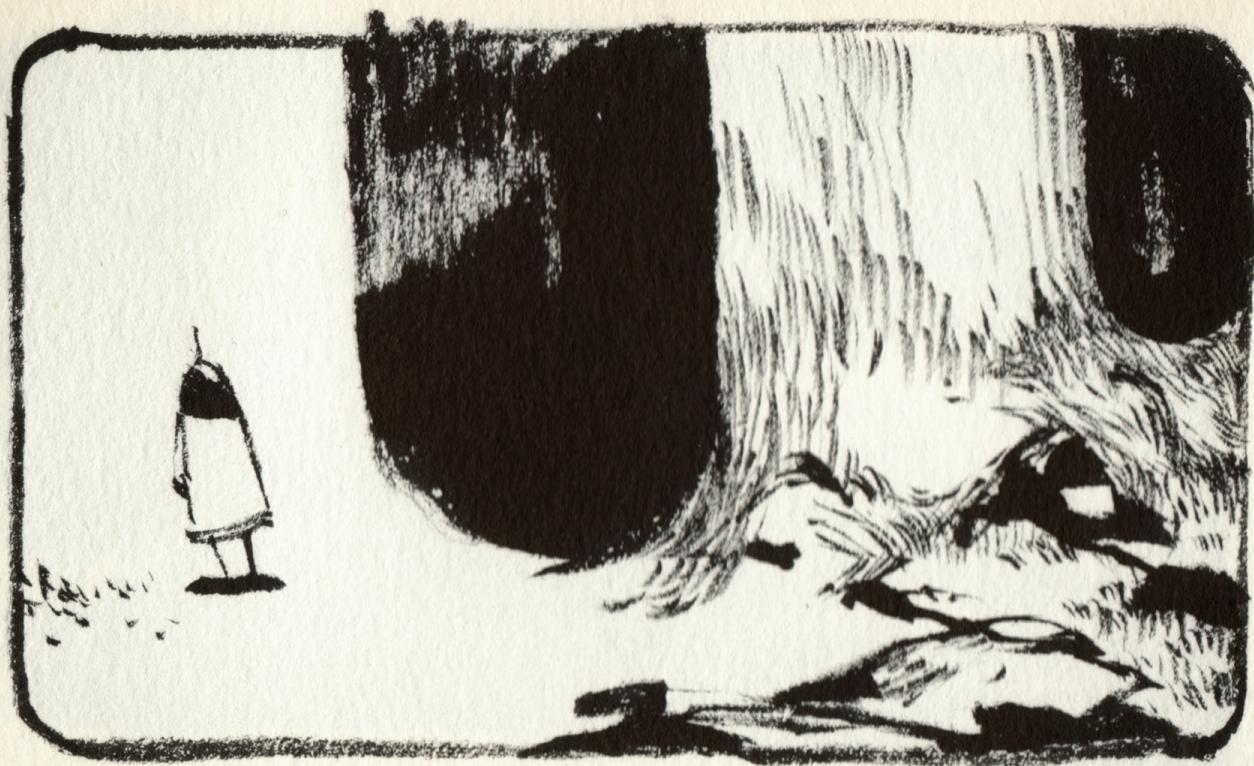
02 Simple and to the point, but with a compositional balance that implies future movement of both figure and frame.

03 *Machine as Abstraction*: The pipes in this image have been created and placed in such a way that they balance one another. This is a liberating way to design even concrete subjects.

04 *Rhythm of Rotation*: An illusion that is reinforced by our brain's clever ability to reconstruct what is not apparent, which is an engagement that I believe is soothing to the audience.



05



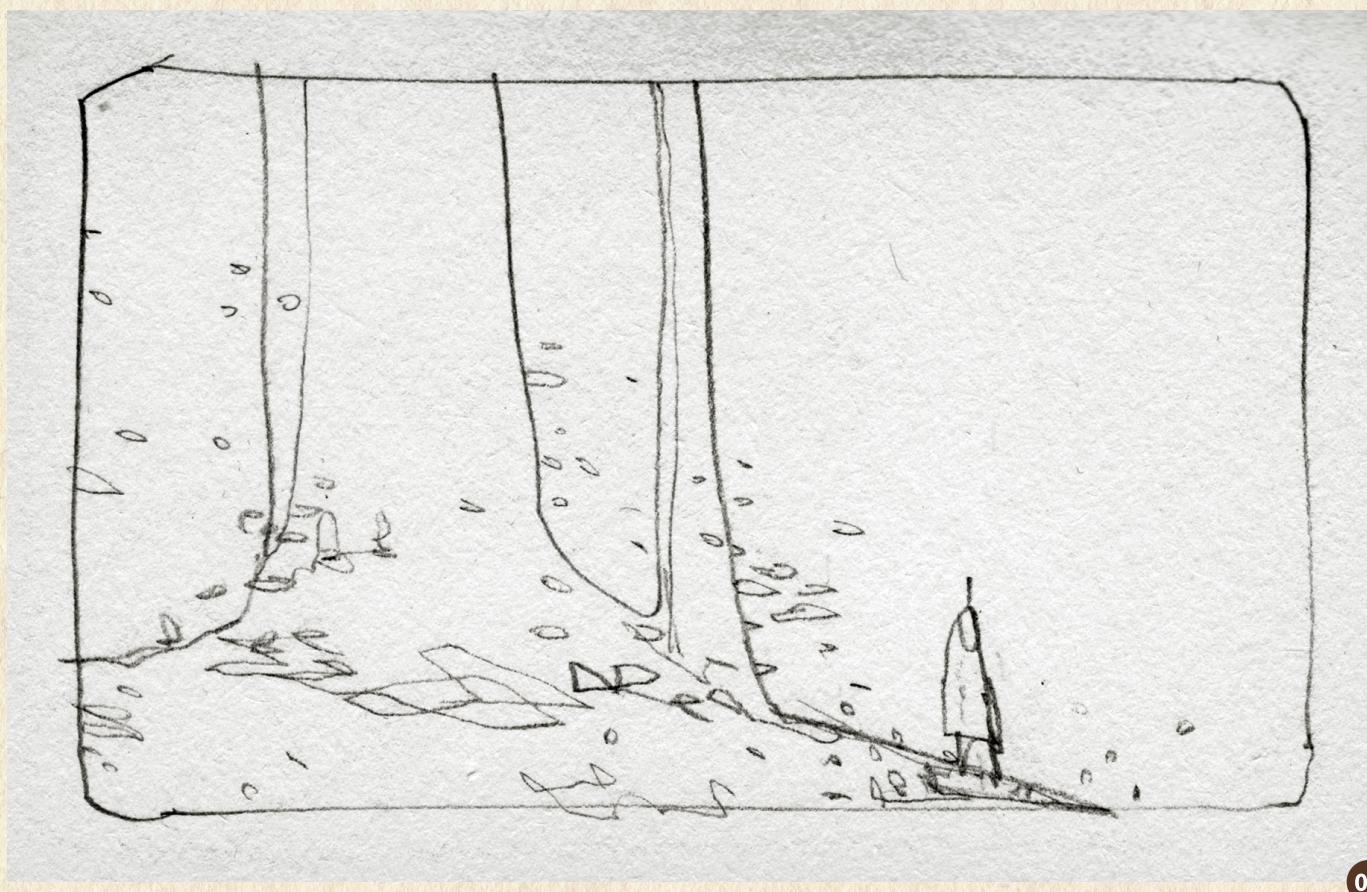
06

05 It can often be valuable to create subjects that leave the composition visible, which is something that's easy to forget. In this image most lines, both real and imaginary, lead to the figure.

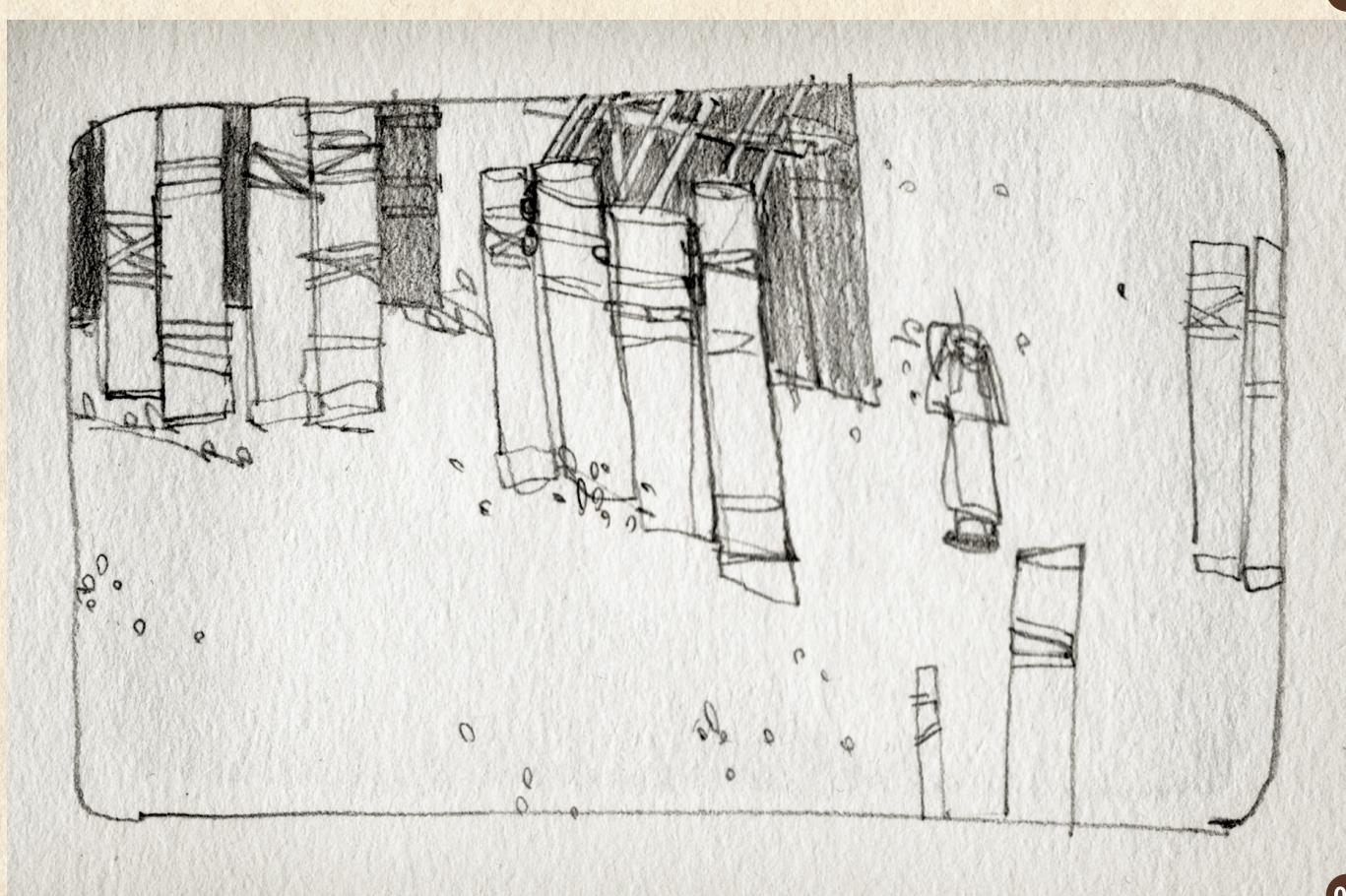
06 This image is an exploration in negative space and a lack of overlaps, which creates an intriguing spatial puzzle. Here emphasis has also been placed upon contrasting areas of texture and rest.

07 This is a shot composed with quite a low horizon, which only exposes a small amount of the terrain. A sense of downward movement is implied as a result and is also accented by the abstracted foliage.

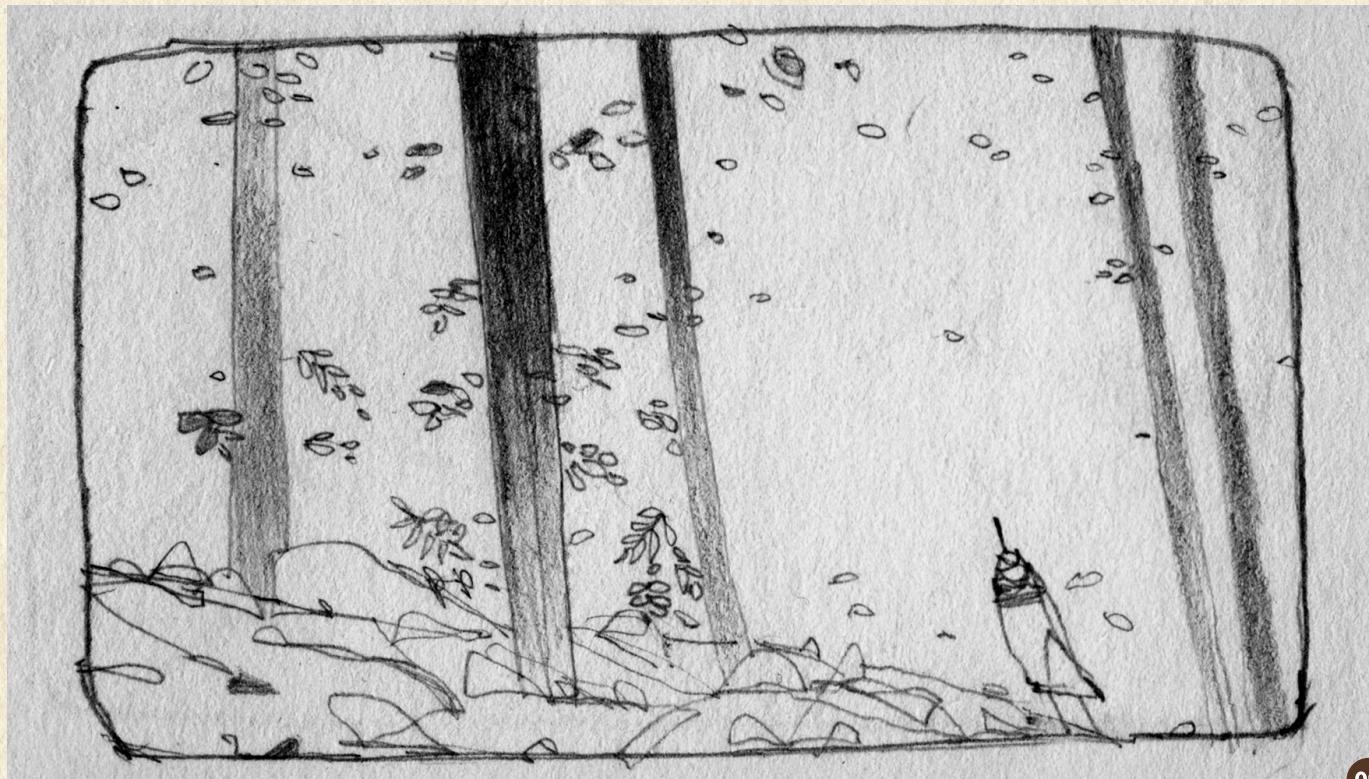
08 The shapes, masses and position of the focal point in this image have been composed to push the viewer's gaze outside of the frame, encouraging them to follow the figure along its future path.



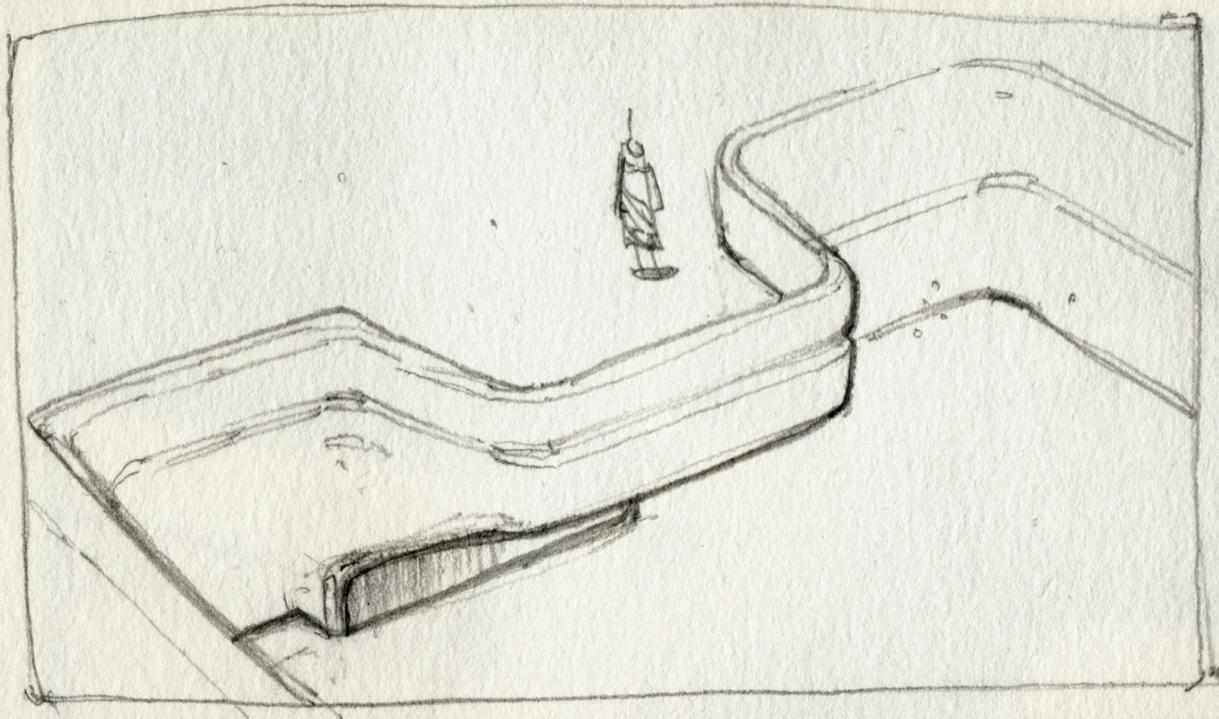
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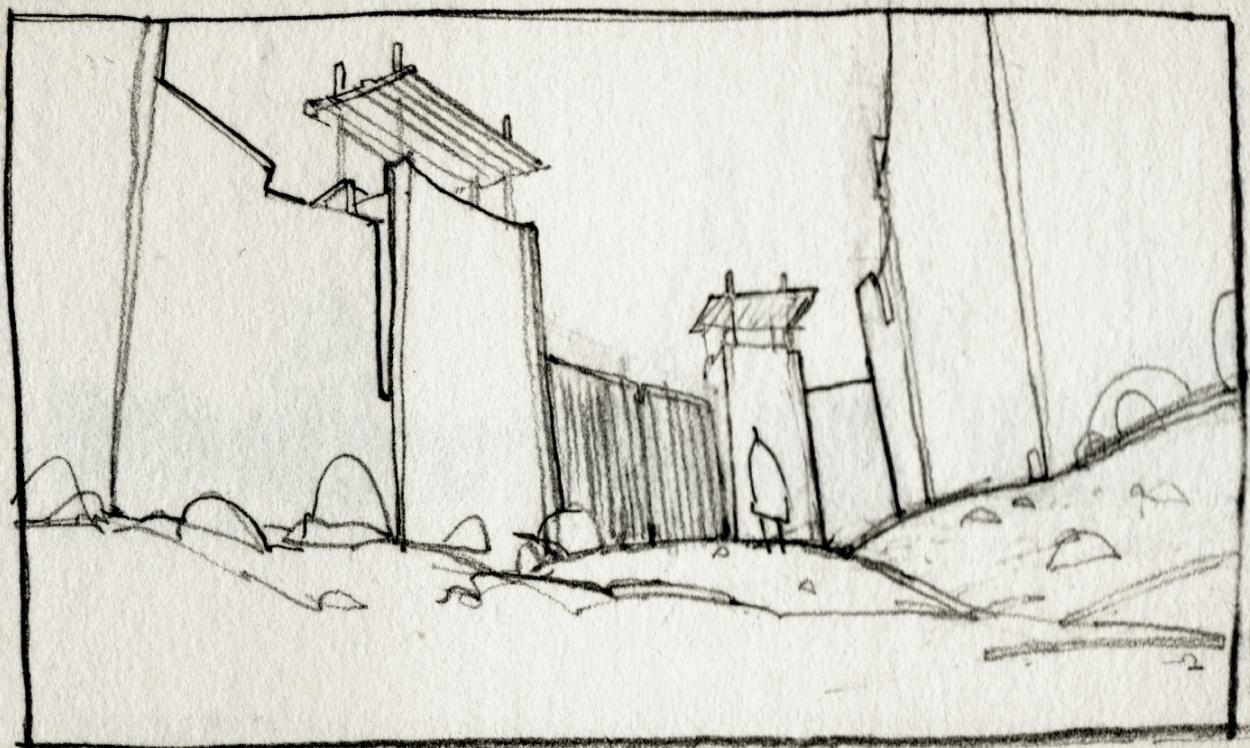
10

09 It can be pleasurable to dance back and forth when drawing, utilizing something like foliage to balance a composition. Instead of just erasing mistakes, why not see if you can balance one mark with another?

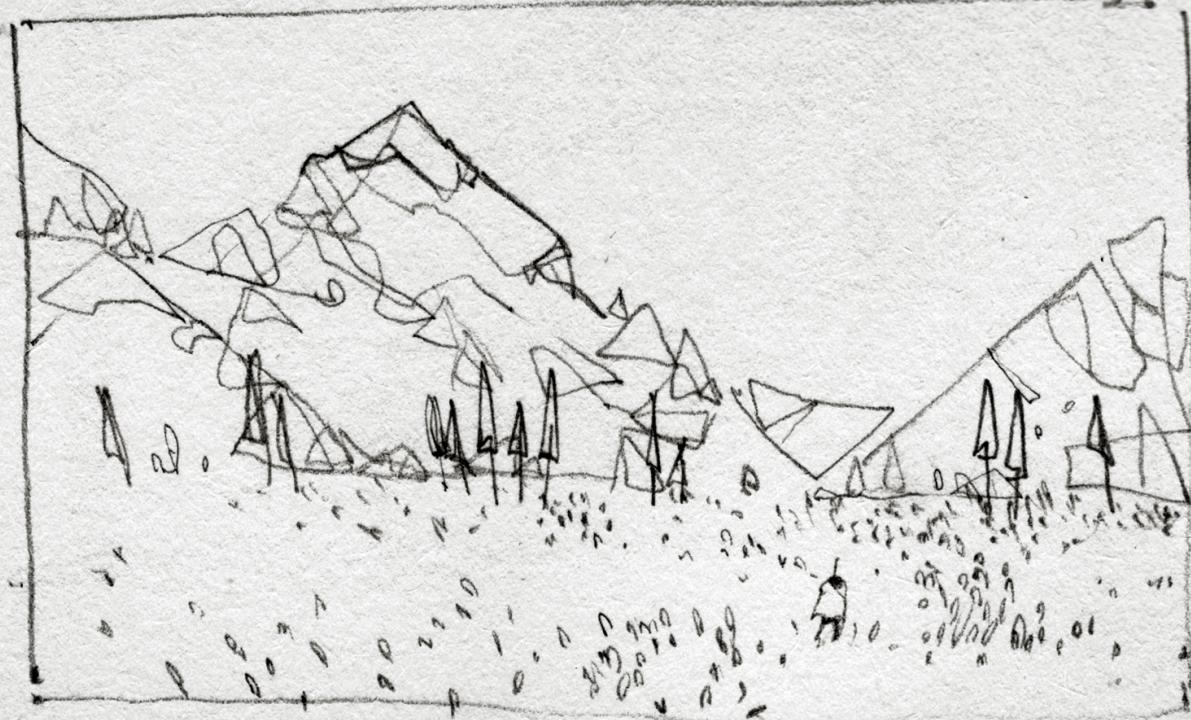
10 At times, my sketches will take the form of artistic exercises that subtly reflect any particular skills or areas that I feel need to be honed within my painted and professional work. In the example shown here, I was working on improving my understanding of spatial construction..

11 It's of particular interest to me how often the golden mean ends up being present even when a sketch is created instinctively.

12 In this sketch I have utilized empty space to draw the attention of the viewer to the singular figure in the foreground of the image. The major masses and edges present also serve to create a similar effect.



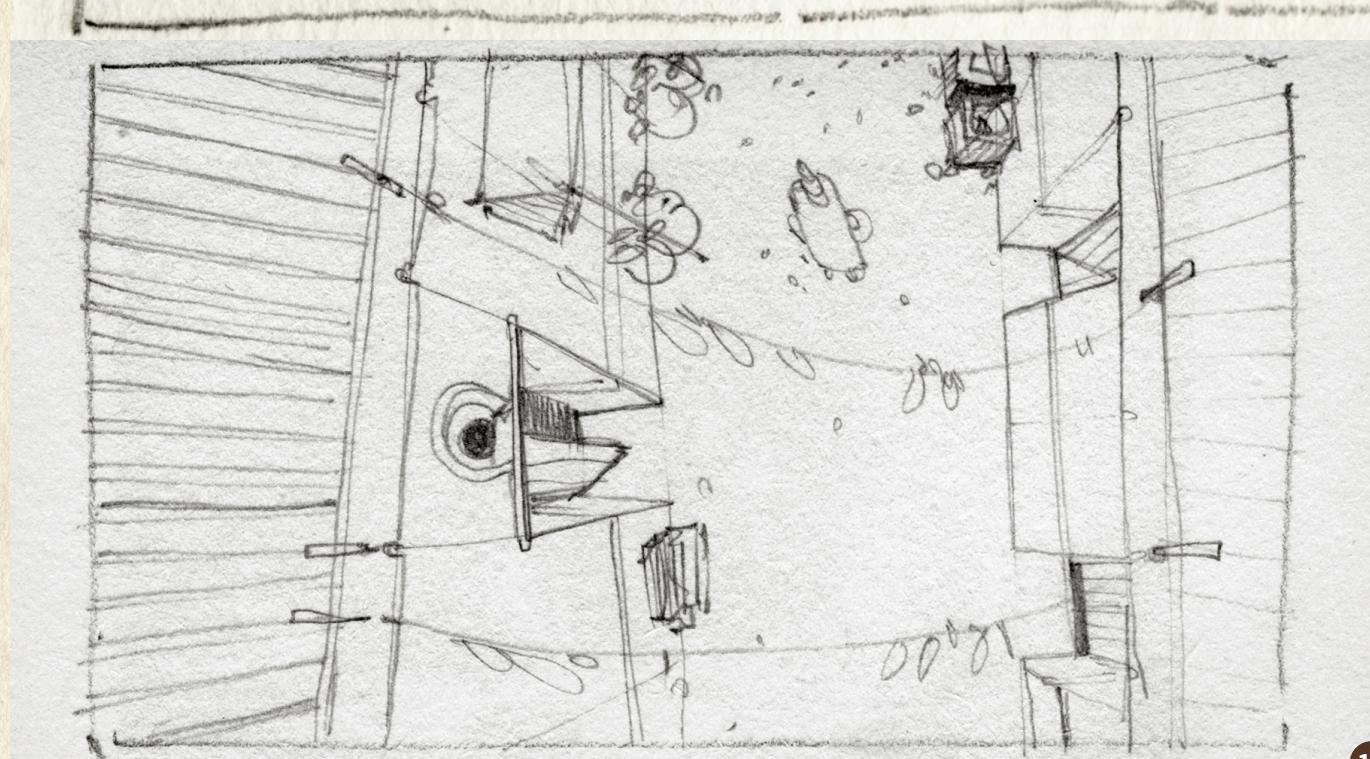
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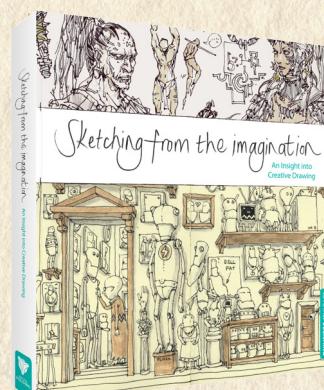
SKETCHBOOK OF THOMAS SCHOLES



13 At times it can be really nice to just slow down when drawing and take some time to think about the significance of every single stroke, value and texture that make up the image.

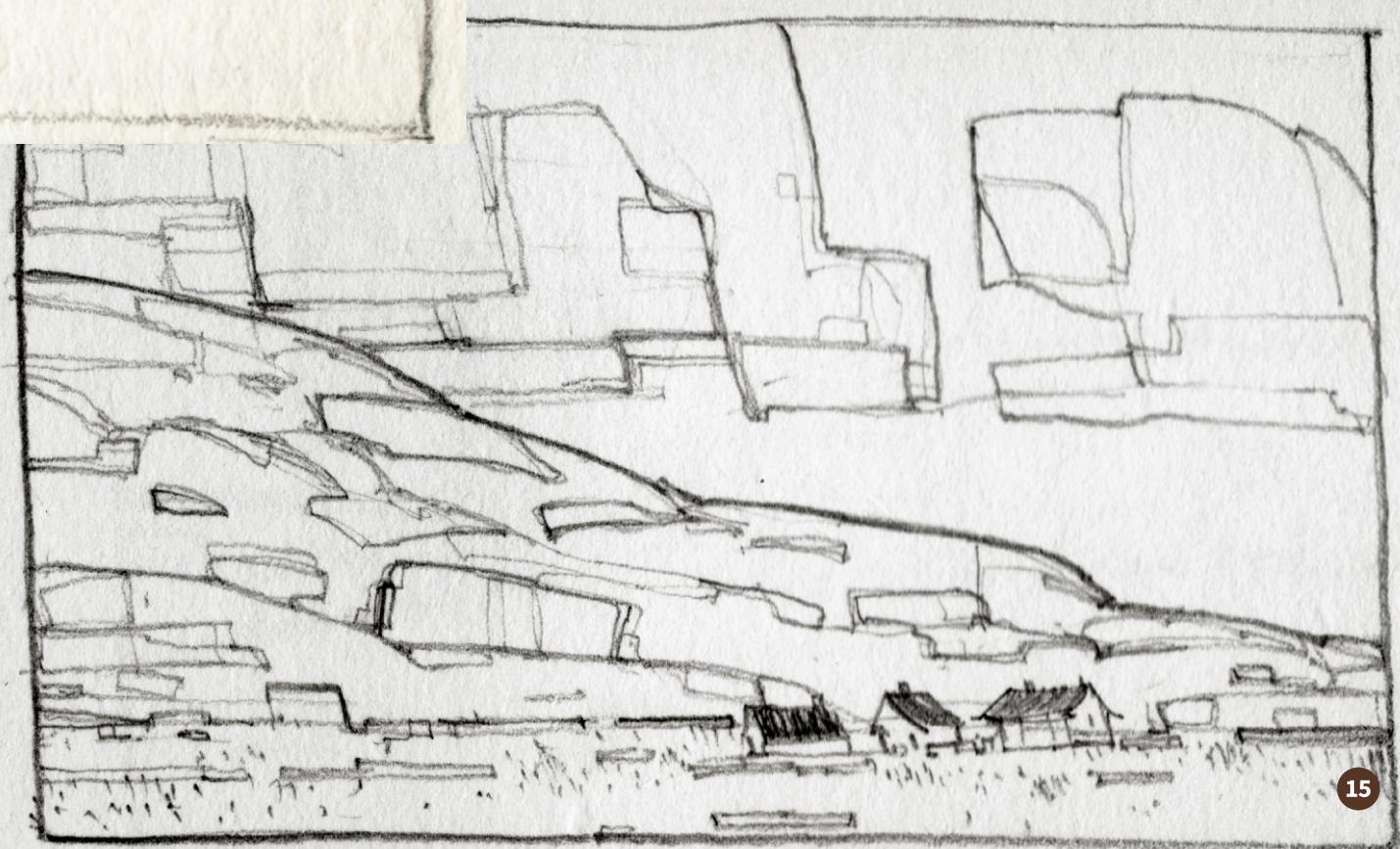
14 This image is one in a series of drawings in which I explore the use of uncommon angles of perspective. I find that in most of my sketch sessions I'll continually revisit a specific theme until that theme results in either stagnation or satisfaction.

15 A sketch showing an exercise in style. In the example here the emphasis has been placed on shape, to create the impression that the image has been rendered with a thick, blocky brush.



For more inspiring concept designs and sketches from some of the world's most talented artists, be sure to check out *Sketching from the imagination: An Insight into Creative Drawing*.

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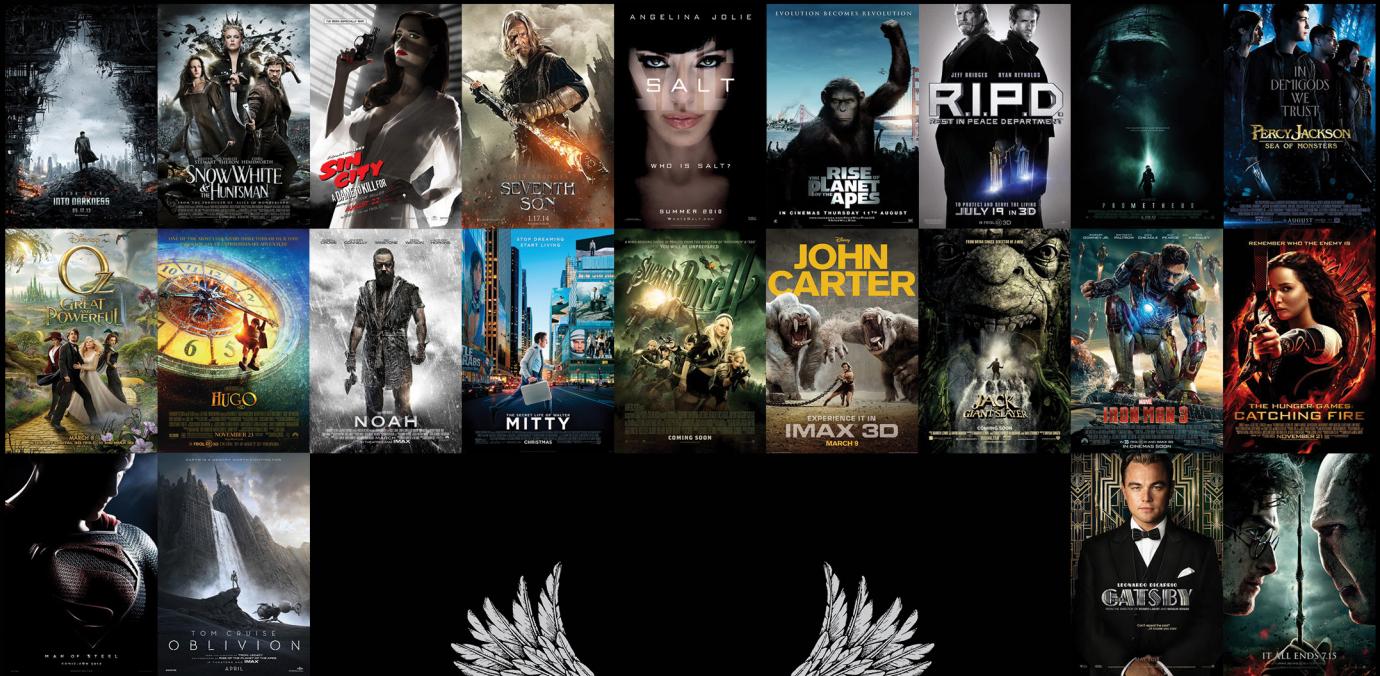
2dartist

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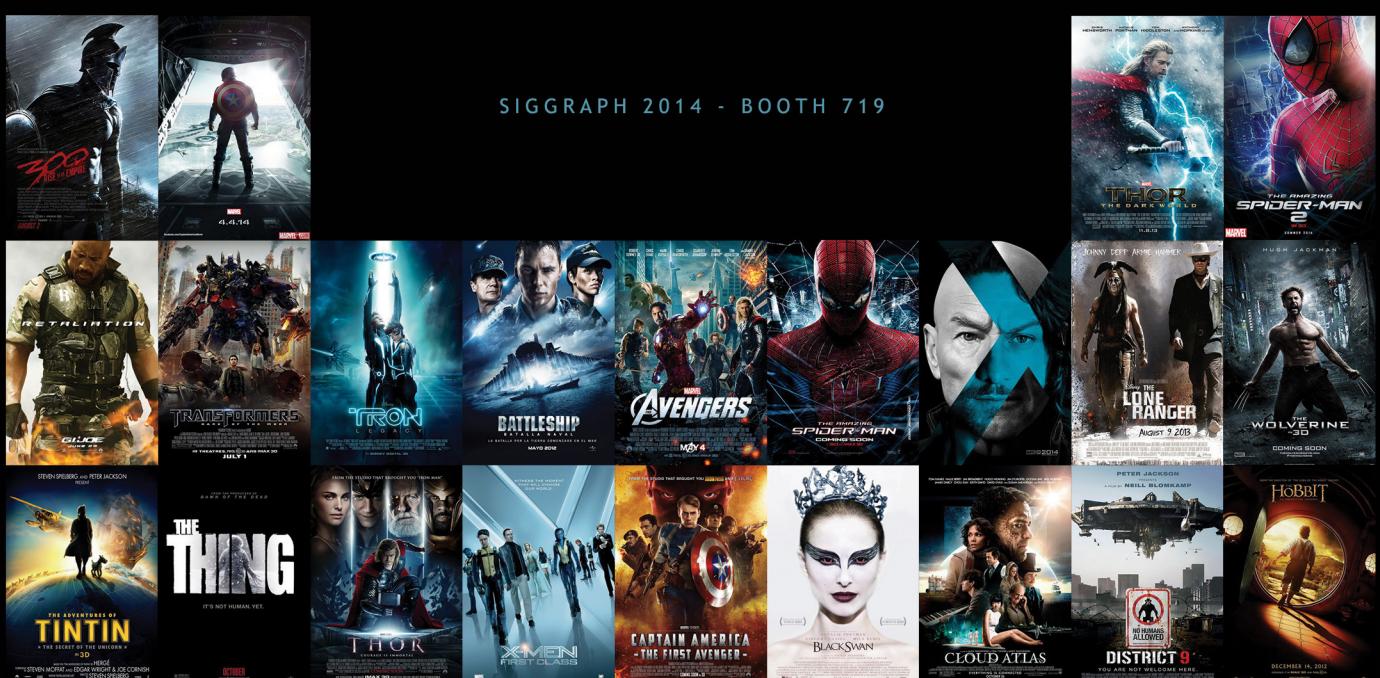
DREAM



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A selection of our Alumni's achievements, congratulations to them all.

Art Gallery

Each issue the 2dartist team selects 10 of the best digital images from around the world. Enjoy!



Deep Jungle

Waqas Mallick

Software used:

Photoshop

Year created: 2014

Web: artstation.com/artist/WaqasMalik

Submit your images! Simply email jess@3dtot.com





February MMCXLIII

Andrey Vozny

Software used:

Photoshop

Year created: 2014

Web: truenorth.carbonmade.com







Midnight Run to Port

Bobby Myers

Software used:

Photoshop

Year created: 2014

Web: bobbymyersart.com







Old Village

JP Roldan

Software used:

Photoshop

Year created: 2014

Web: artstation.com/artist/Roldan

ROLDAN



Desultor

Kamil Murzyn

Year created: 2014

Web: facebook.com/kamilmurzynarts





KAMIL
MURZYN





Industrial City

Michał Matczak

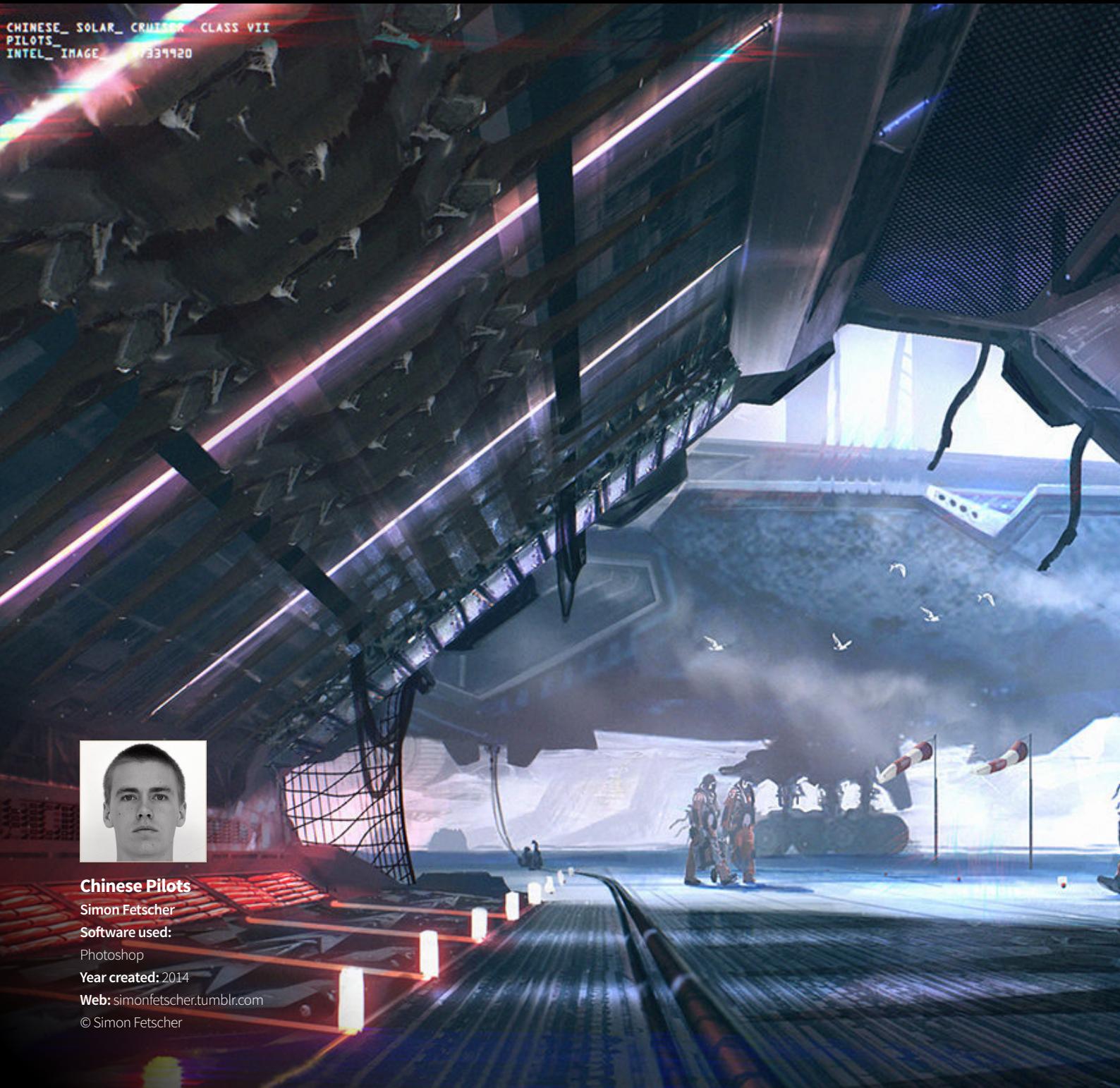
Year created: 2013

Web: michalmatczak.com

Based on a concept by YongSub Noh



MAICRAK
2013







The Snow

Jeremy Chong

Software used:

Photoshop

Year created: 2011

Web: mixppl87.blogspot.com







Full Moon

Daniel Romanovsky

Software used:

Photoshop

Year created: 2013

Web: formlanguage.net

© Daniel Romanovsky







New Worlds Rural

Bram 'Boco' Sels

Software used:

Photoshop

Year created: 2013

Web: artofboco.com

Based on a concept by YongSub Noh





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THE ART OF LOÏC ZIMMERMANN

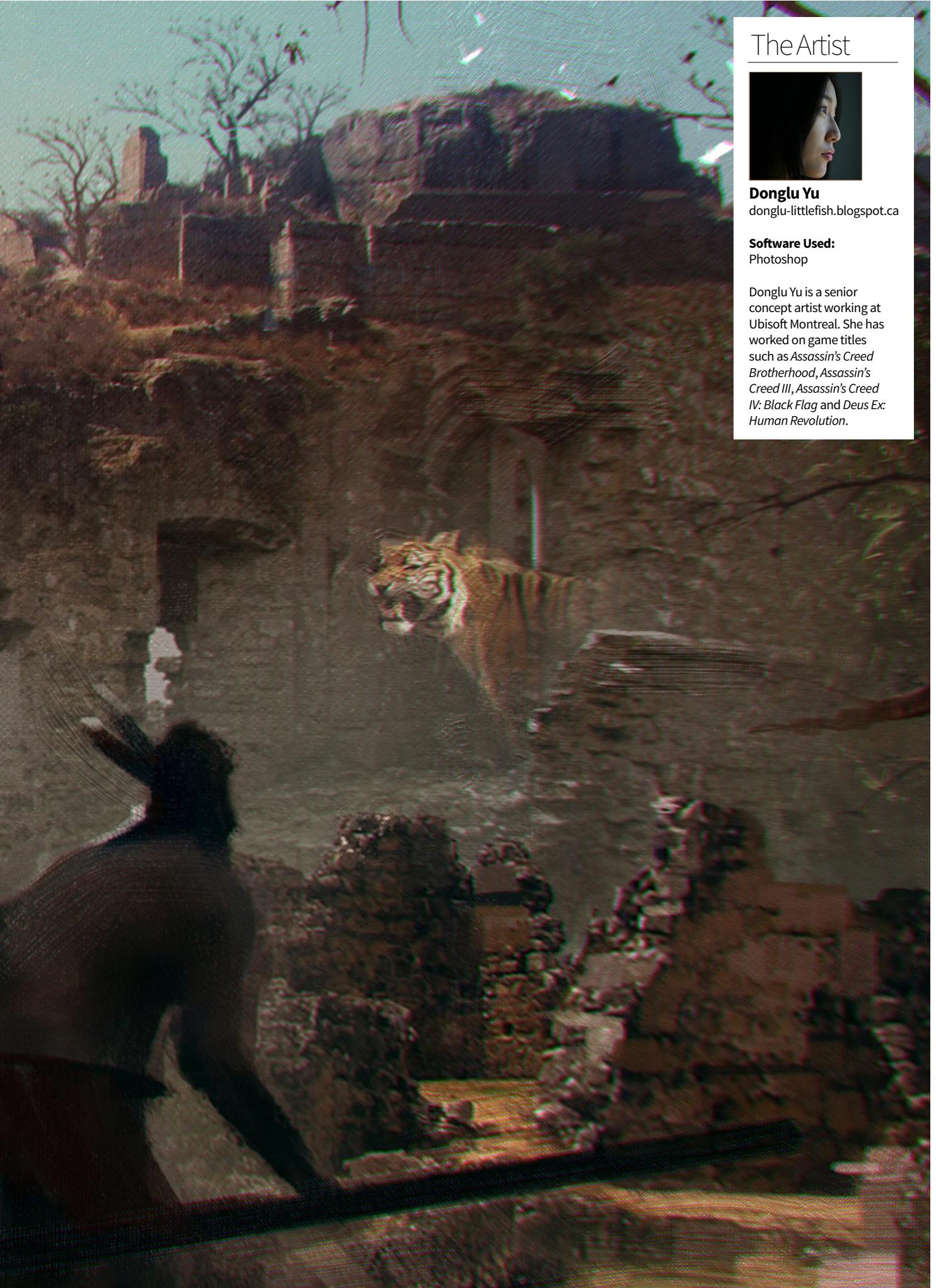
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3DTOTAL PUBLISHING



Create custom brushes with photos

As part of a series that takes a look at both the fundamentals of creating visual art and the technical parts of digital painting, Donglu Yu provides detailed, step-by-step tutorials that cover the principal techniques employed in Photoshop to create a complex action scene of your own. In this issue, Donglu combines sketch elements and custom photo brushes to create a more detailed black-and-white painting ➤



The Artist



Donglu Yu
donglu-littlefish.blogspot.ca

Software Used:
Photoshop

Donglu Yu is a senior concept artist working at Ubisoft Montreal. She has worked on game titles such as *Assassin's Creed Brotherhood*, *Assassin's Creed III*, *Assassin's Creed IV: Black Flag* and *Deus Ex: Human Revolution*.

Learn how to build up your scene using custom brushes and incorporating characters...

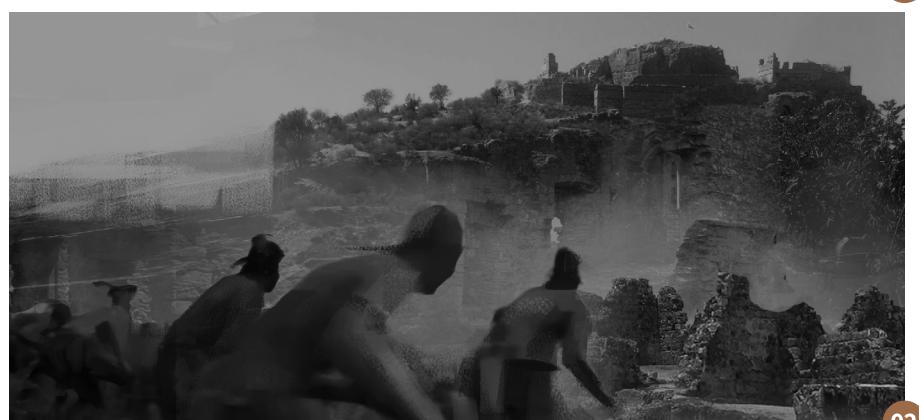
In this tutorial, I will focus on how to bring all the sketch elements together in order to build a complete black-and-white image.

01 Adding the hunters: Since we've already created a series of solid sketches of both characters and temple ruins, we have a solid base to start from. I finally choose the second environment sketch, showing less-destroyed ruins standing on top of a hill, because its path leads the viewers' eye into the image well and it has good story-telling potential.

I take the first character sketch that I did in the previous part and try to integrate the natives into the foreground. Don't be afraid to use the Free Transform tool to scale and flip the characters to find the best way to blend them with the background. I usually make two to three versions to pick the best. With the added hunters, the image suddenly becomes more alive and gains an extra layer of information.

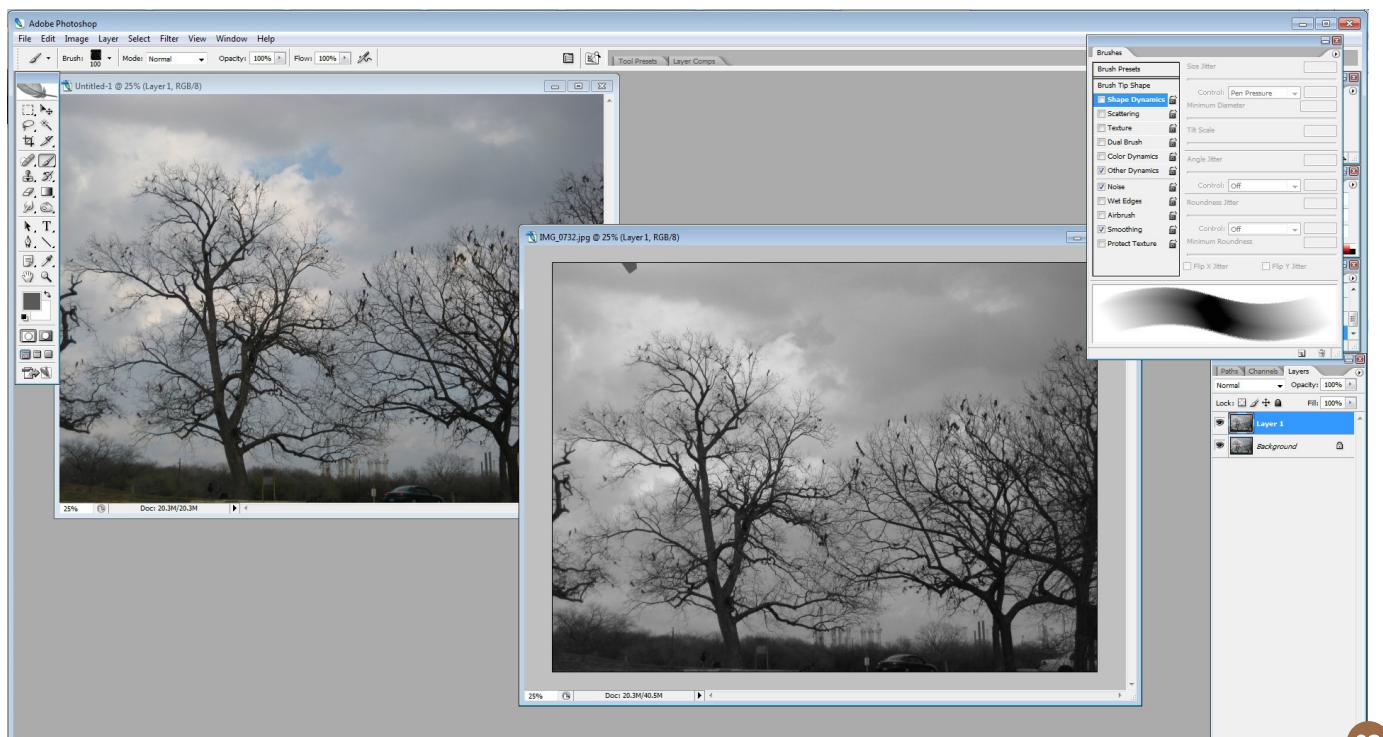
02 More characters: I take a step back and look at the image. The left side feels

"As digital artists, we don't only need to master all the traditional art notions; we also need a few technologically enhanced tricks to help us to achieve the best visual result"



very empty, so I decide to add another group of characters. I take the second hunter sketch that I did, and reduce them in size considerably to place them behind my other hunters. Much more depth is then suggested with the newly added hunters: I reduce their sizes proportionally as they recede further into the distance.

03 Creating custom brushes: In a fast-paced entertainment industry like ours, production speed is one of the most important requirements in the workplace. As digital artists, we don't only need to master all the traditional art notions; we also need a few technologically enhanced tricks to help us to achieve the best visual result.



For the background temple, I want to add a few tree silhouettes. I already know that I will also need them later for my foreground, so I create a custom brush to ease the process.

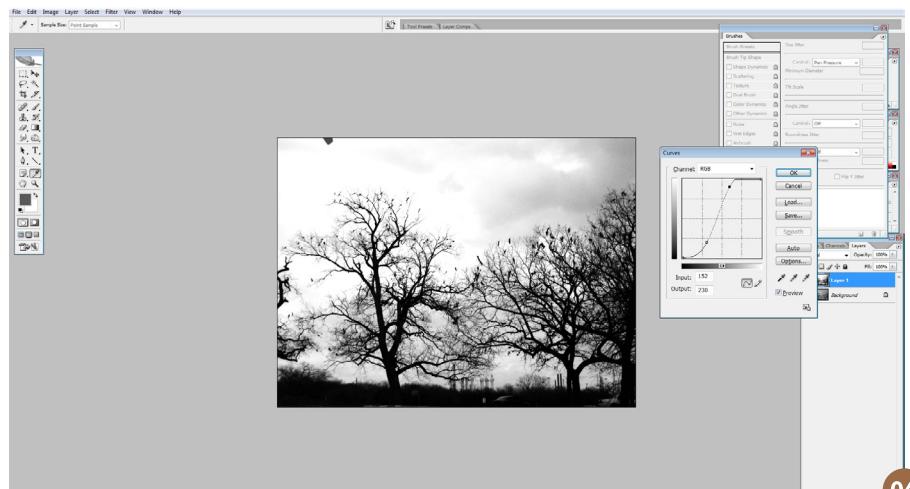
I open one of the pictures that I took during my trip to Texas. Since the trees are in dark tones against a light sky, it will be much simpler for us to extract the intricate and nice tree branches. Please note that this kind of level of detail and the natural randomness of the tree branch shapes and distribution can't be hand-painted with a round brush, but it would take ages.

04 Preparing the image: I then simply desaturate the original image and use the Curves adjustment to boost up the contrast. You can also use the Levels adjustment or the Brightness/Contrast adjustment to achieve the same result – any Photoshop technique that suits your work habits will do.

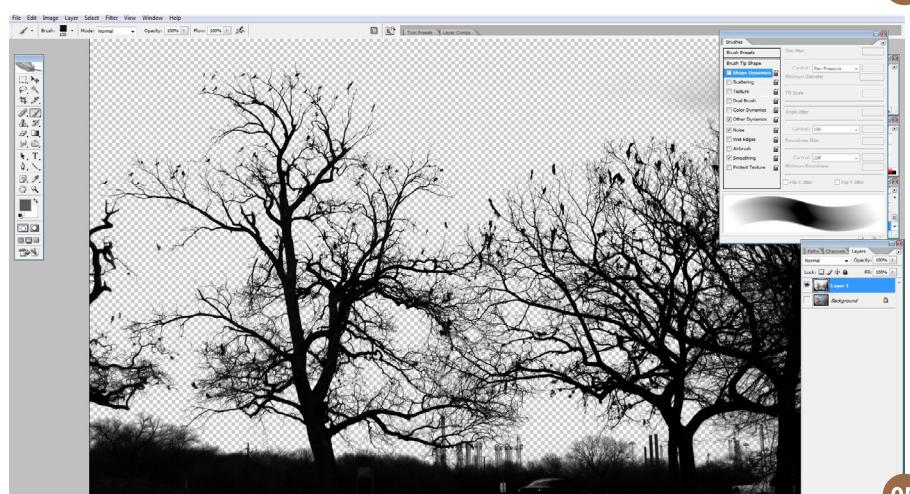
05 Extracting the image: With the highly contrasted tree silhouetted against the almost white sky, you can use Extract under the Filter tab, or Color Range under the Select tab, or any other masking methods that work for you to get rid of the light background.

Now we are left with a clean cut-out of the trees. And, of course, all the tiny tree branch details are neatly preserved!

06 Refining the image: I continue erasing all the extra trees on both the left and the right sides. This step requires some patience, as it is extremely important that the silhouette is exactly how you want, otherwise when you turn this into a brush, the unwanted single black dot will repeat endlessly with each single brushstroke. ▶



04



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01 Integrating the sketches of the natives into the scene

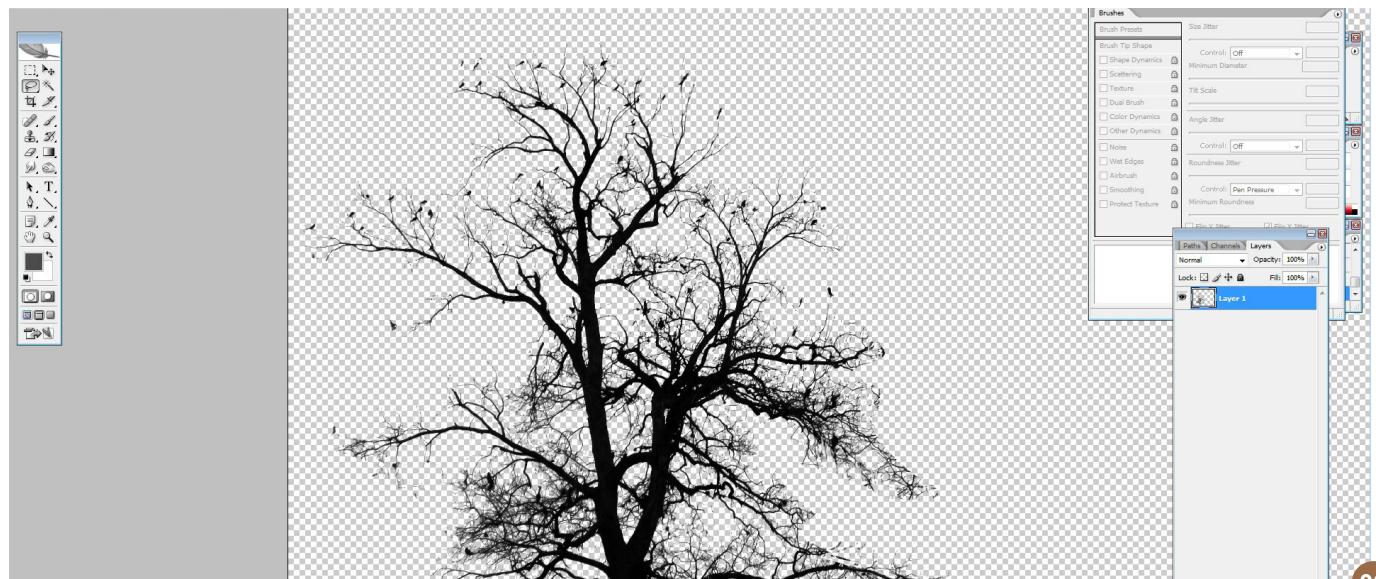
02 Adding more hunters and reducing them to create the impression of distance

03 Using an image of a tree to create a custom brush

04 De-saturating and tweaking the contrast to make the best base image

05 Extracting the tree image and preserving the fine branch detail

06 Making sure that all the details are exact on the image



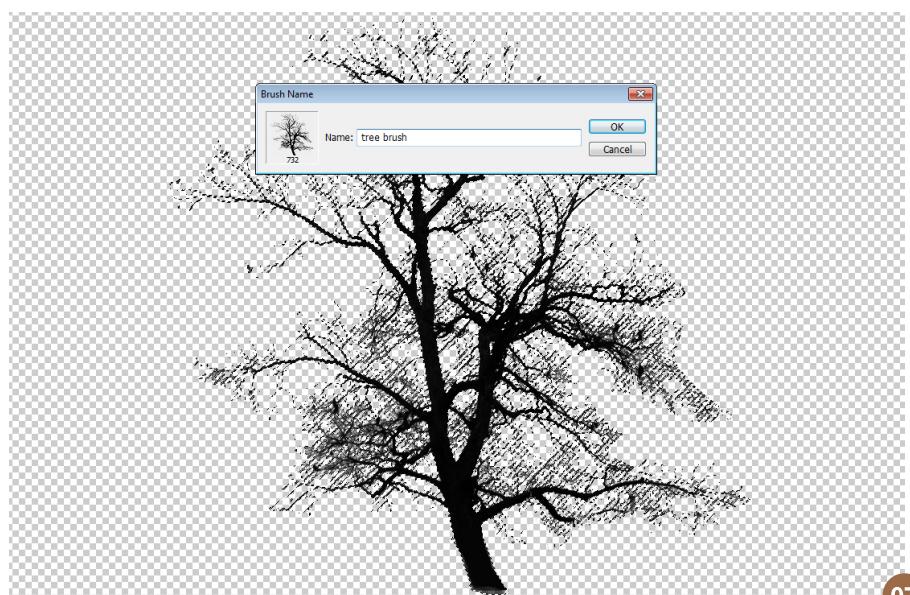
06

07 **Naming the brush:** Now select the tree, go to the Edit tab and click on Define Brush Preset. Give it a name as you will have many brushes in your Brush Preset window and it is important to name it properly to avoid confusion later.

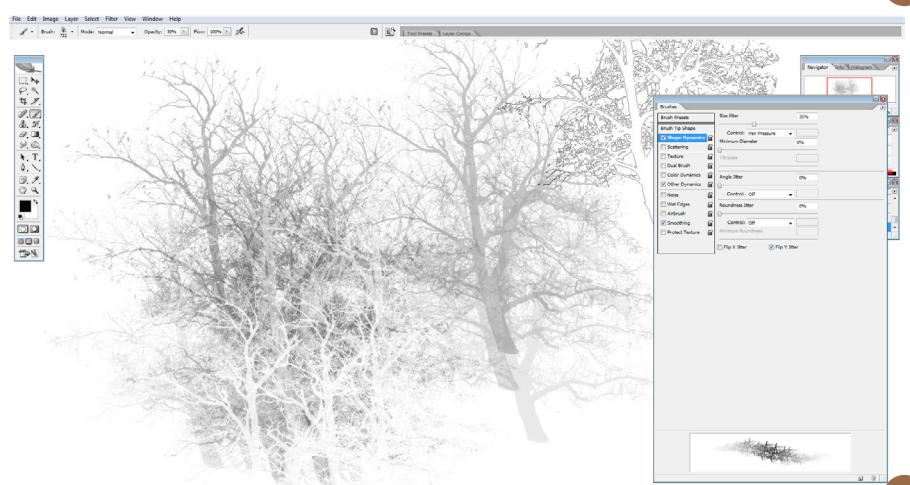
08 **Adjusting the settings:** The newly-made brush should appear now in your brush collection, but it is not over yet. Open your Brushes window under the Window tab and you will be offered many options to alter your original Tree brush. You could spend half an hour playing with the settings, but I will talk about just two of them that are used the most frequently: Shape Dynamic and Other Dynamics. You can use them to give some random effects to your original brush. So when you apply your brushstroke, the original brush shape will change in size, angle, roundness and perhaps opacity along the brushstroke path.

In our case, since it is a recognizably shaped brush, unlike those Charcoal, Pencil or Oil brushes, which aim to mimic certain specific traditional media, you don't want to go too crazy with the settings. I would only apply some Size, Opacity Jitter, and maybe some very subtle Angle Jitter to it, because if I want to build a forest with the brush later, I don't want to have upside-down trees there.

After you have played with all the settings, please don't forget to save the brush again and give it



07



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a new name, otherwise all the settings that you have just spent 20 minutes to get will be lost once you change your brush.

09 Using the brush: It will be fun to not only paint with the brush, but also to erase with it. You can see some results that I had with my new brush in this image here.

If I have to make a digital painting with more forest/trees content, I will certainly make a few other brushes by repeating the previous steps that I just have explained. It will give more variation and more appeal to the vegetation. However, for this painting, I only need it to hint a few silhouettes, so I will make one or two strokes here and there, and then move forward with the black-and-white painting.

10 Adding more elements: I select the tree brush and place a few trees near the temple top. As long as you select the right gray tone, they should blend in easily with the rest of the painting. I continue by adding the hunters' target: the tiger. Now the image becomes complete in terms of story-telling. The confrontation is set right at the center of attention: the beast is fierce and the hunters have their eyes on it ready to capture the wild animal.

11 Framing the image: Finally I put some big tree trunks on the left and right top corners of the paintings to make the composition more visually appealing. All the subtle details of the small branches are done with our new brush. I have circled all the areas that are touched up with our new brush in red.



10



11

12 Adding more elements: This last image shows the final black-and-white painting that I achieve before moving forward with colors. ●

09 Applying the custom tree brush to create silhouettes in the scene

10 Adding the story-telling elements to complete the narrative

11 Creating a more appealing composition by adding tree trunks around the frame

12 The final image ready to begin coloring the scene



12

**INTRODUCE
COLOR AND
PHOTOS**

CHAPTER 03 CAN BE SEEN
IN ISSUE 104 NEXT
MONTH!

2dartist.

Issue 103 | July 2014

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103

43
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THE SECRETS OF 3D PAINTOVERS

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lighting scenarios



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Master lighting scenarios

Nacho Yagüe demonstrates how to change the mood of a scene to dusk, revealing his most commonly used processes when drastically changing the mood or light direction, and explains some aspects about lighting along the way 





The Artist



Nacho Yagüe
nachoyague.net

Software Used:
Photoshop

Nacho Yagüe is a concept artist in the videogame industry who has worked on projects such as *Splinter Cell: Blacklist* and the upcoming *Assassin's Creed: Unity*. He currently works at Ubisoft Toronto (Canada).

**ADAPT INTERIOR
LIGHTING
CONDITIONS**

CHAPTER 02 CAN BE SEEN
IN ISSUE 102
2dartistmag.com

Learn how to alter the lighting scenario and mood in your existing scene...

In this tutorial, I'm going to talk about a situation that happens a lot in a professional studio environment – how to deal with changes of mood or light on a piece you've already made.

I will show you how I change the mood and lighting of an original piece, *The playground (morning version)*, into a naturally lit night scene. I will explain the general steps I followed, and add some tips to keep in mind when changing the light settings in general.

01 Setting the light source/angle:

Before starting, I make a quick diagram of where the sun or moon should be in each piece.

In this scene, I situate the moon close to the window. Since I will not use any artificial light in this scene, I decide that the light coming from the outside has to be from a full moon. This way I can ensure that I will have enough light to create a nice atmosphere inside.

As I have two night scenes, I try not to repeat the same tones. Doing a night scene gives you less freedom when choosing a palette, but there are enough combinations to play with to create a good scene.

02 Adding the base tone:

I change the color tones of my original image separately. I use Curves (Image > Adjust > Curves) because it gives me more control over the



areas I want to modify. I need to tone down the brightness too, and I get the desired effect by tweaking the Curves and Brightness and Contrast settings to my taste (Image > Adjust > Brightness and Contrast).

I separate out all of the elements of the scene into layers, so it's easier for me to make all these changes on each area without affecting the others. I always apply these changes with a Clipping Mask, so the original layer would then remain intact.

03 Correcting values and color balance:

Although this is still in a very early stage, I always try to keep the values in mind. It's very important not to forget about values, because if they are wrong the image won't look natural.

I keep applying the tonal changes to every area of the room, checking the values from time to

time. I usually have an adjustment layer set in Desaturate mode on the top of all my layers to quickly turn on to show a black-and-white version of the image. I can then check the values.

04 Setting the light:

I keep changing the brightness, contrast and basic color tone. At this stage, the image is looking very monochromatic and dark, but that's the idea. Once I have the base image I can start adding light and some atmosphere. There are two sources of light that I want to add – the candles on the left of the scene and the fireplace.

I had the assignment of doing a night scene with a natural light source, so fire was the ideal one and knowing that I have another night scene to do, that's what motivated this color palette choice. The moonlight coming through the window will help me to balance the warm tones of the fireplace. ►





03



04

- 01 A sketch showing where the light will come from
- 02 Changing the tones and brightness of each area separately
- 03 Adding an adjustment layer set in Hue / Saturation mode on the top of my layers
- 04 Changing the brightness, contrast and color tone to set light and atmosphere

PRO TIP

Be smart with your decisions

When you are working in videogames, sometimes you have very tight deadlines, so it's important to be smart with the way you approach an image. Be organized and always have in mind that maybe they will ask for changes or variations. Think about what you want to communicate and how you want to show it, and then put effort into that message. It's not necessary to detail the whole scene. Be smart and focus on what you want to show. An over-detailed image can get very messy and chaotic – sometimes keeping it simple and to the point works better.

Blue and orange are complementary colors and usually they work well, though I generally try to avoid this palette because it looks very generic.

05 Basic night scene: I can now paint the light coming through the window. I use the Selection tool to draw the window shape and add two different layers – one in Screen mode and the other in Overlay. After painting inside the selected areas, I apply a Blur filter. The shadows cast by the moon are not particularly strong, so I blend them a little bit more with the floor.

I save this image in another folder, because I will use it as a base for developing other light versions of the scene.

06 Light sources: I thought about having three different sources of natural light – the one coming from the moonlight that I had previously added, the candles on the left of the horse, and the fireplace.

Understanding the nature of the light you're adding will help you when making an environment. Fire is a natural source of light that is constantly varying its intensity, so it casts shadows that are continually changing in size and strength. The main light will be the one projected from the fireplace and it will cast the strongest shadows. The light coming from the candles won't be as strong but will be enough to light the ball beside it.

07 Adding the first light source: The fire is the main light source here. The light is strong enough to cast long shadows, and if we



05

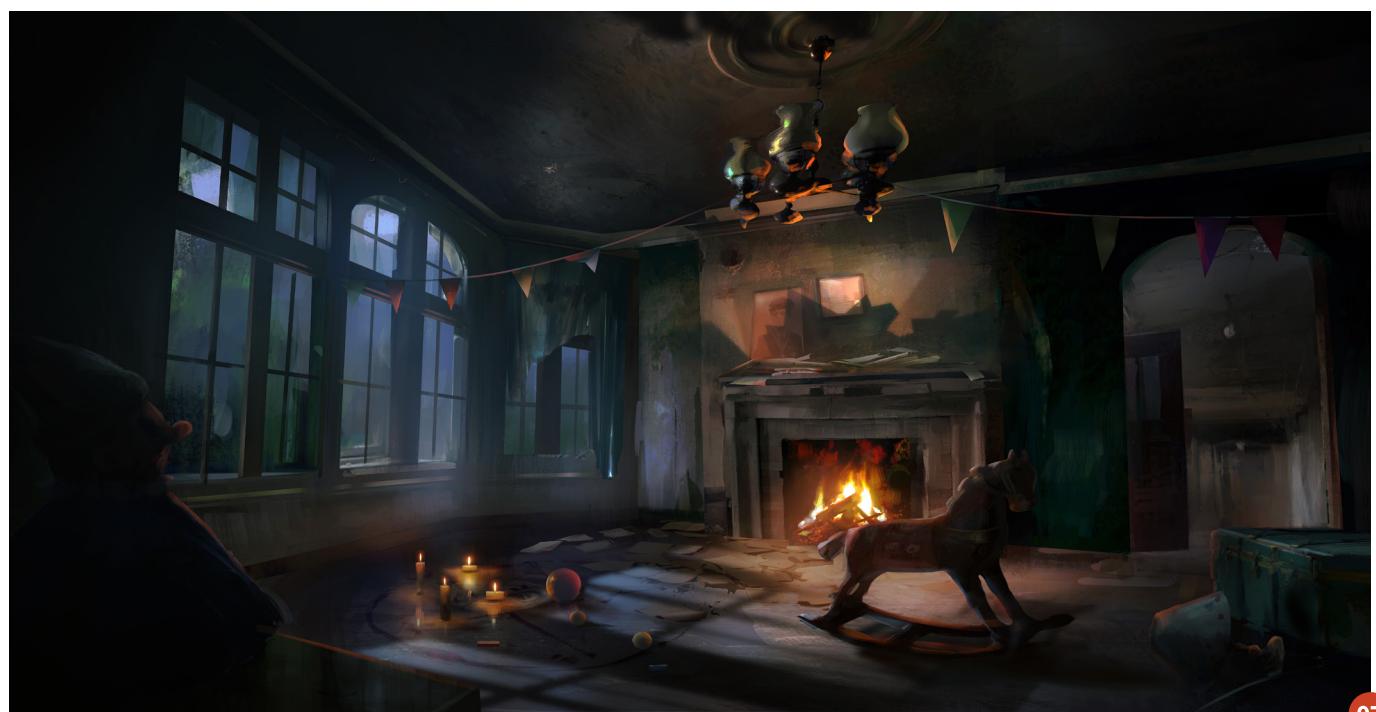


06

turn the image to black-and-white and check the values, we'll see that this area is the one with the brightest tones.

I project some shadows from the papers and books above the fireplace, then some other more intense shadows, and other longer and duller

shadow forms around the scene. Adding these different gradients emulates the way fire creates these unpredictable shadows in its movement. I want to balance the values so I also add a first layer of light on the ceiling and illuminate the corridor on the right a little.



07

“The same scene can have a totally different meaning and power if you choose the right composition, angle and elements”

08 **Balancing the composition:** This area around the window appears very dark and flat compared to the central area with the fireplace, so I reinforce the light and shadows there. The red and yellow balls are receiving light from the two sources: the fireplace and the candles. The tiny ghost lamp is reflecting a nice blue light from outside as well, and its plastic material is reflecting the light from the candles.

With a Soft brush I paint some haze that helps me to integrate all these elements and tone down the dark areas from the window-frame a little bit, reinforcing the idea of having a full moon outside.

09 **The little kid:** The creepy little kid with a paperbag on his head makes another appearance (if you missed previous chapters, I painted this kid wandering around the room).

This element gives extra visual power to the image and engages the viewer in the image a little more, making them question who is this little kid and why is he covering his face with a paperbag. Painting is like taking a picture. The same scene can have a totally different meaning and power if you choose the right composition, angle and elements. This same room without the key elements as the painting on the floor and the kid would be more forgettable.



08

10 **Final retouches:** This last step is the most boring one, yet it's important to help enhance the composition.

I balance the colors a little bit. This time I use Image > Adjust > Photo Filter to slightly change the overall tone. I darken the room a little bit and turn my image to black-and-white to do a last value check.

There are some very dark areas that I want to remove, so I add a new layer on Screen mode to soften them. I give more emphasis to the moonlight and the rim light on the wooden horse, because I'm starting to lose its shape with all the dark areas. To finalize the piece, I paint some embers to add some movement. ●

05 **Adding the night tones and saving this image as the base for other variations of this scene**

06 **Diagram showing how light will bounce in different ways**

07 **Adding the fire that makes the main source of light and sets the composition**

08 **More light reflections on the left side help balance the composition**

09 **Placing the little kid in the corridor on the right side of the image**



09

The Artist



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Khalid Al-Muharraqi is an artist in every sense of the word—it runs in his family. Khalid and his father Abdulla Al-Muharraqi were recently honored with a father and son art exhibit in Bahrain, opened by His Royal Highness, the Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Bahrain. LightWave 3D is essential software for Khalid's craft—transforming ideas into art that is revered worldwide.

"LightWave 3D is the tool that helps me create the images in my head. I use a variety of 3D applications, but LightWave 3D is always the backbone of my work. It has tools that make sense to me and allow me to reach my artistic goals." – Khalid Al-Muharraqi

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Transform your line art

Even Mehl Amundsen demonstrates his process of turning a piece of line art into a rendered illustration in Photoshop. Even reveals top techniques for building up a color palette and adding atmospheric effects using a gradient map ➤

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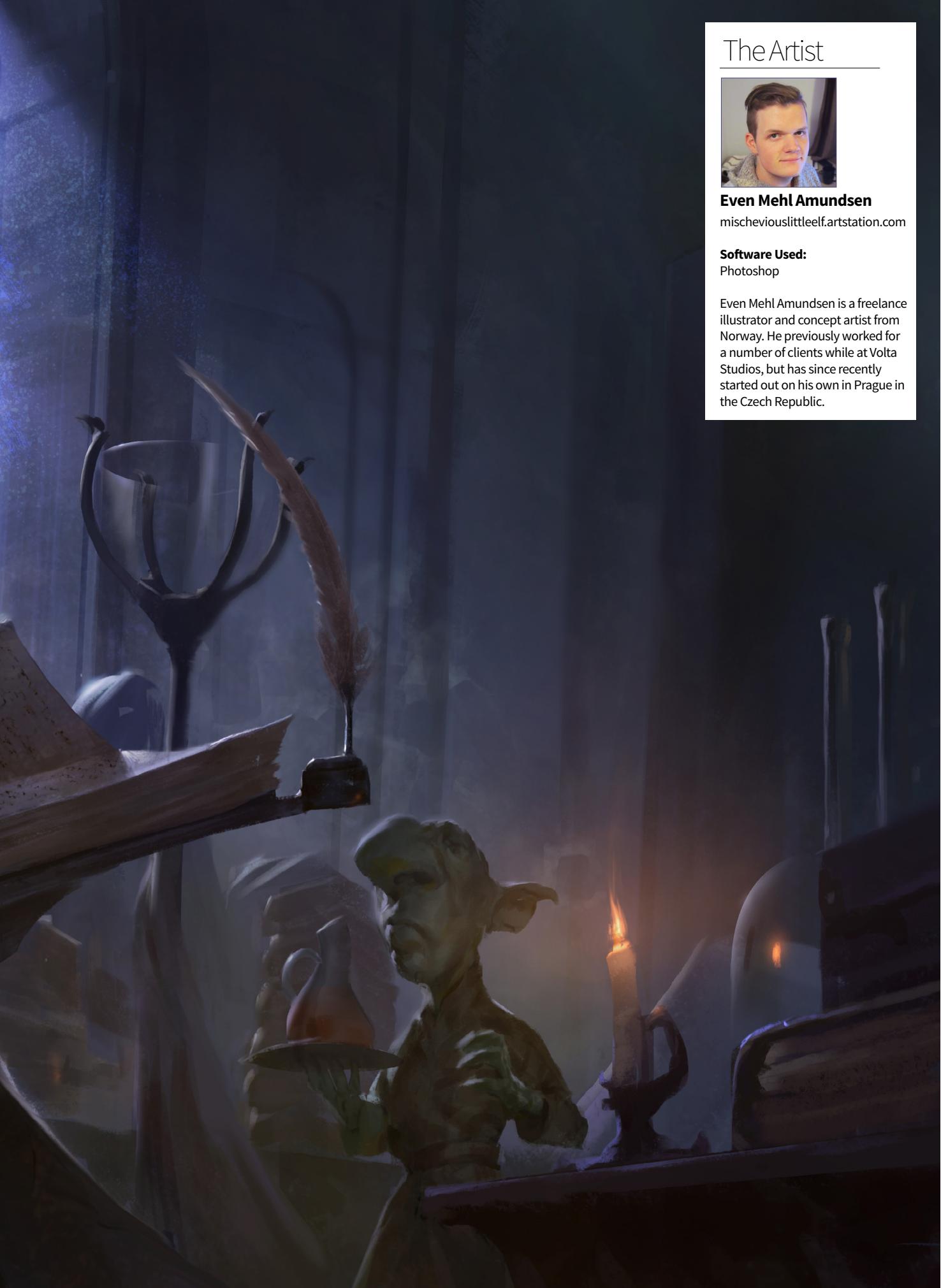
Even Mehl Amundsen

mischievouslittleelf.artstation.com

Software Used:

Photoshop

Even Mehl Amundsen is a freelance illustrator and concept artist from Norway. He previously worked for a number of clients while at Volta Studios, but has since recently started out on his own in Prague in the Czech Republic.



Discover how to render your line art into a polished cinematic illustration...

So I was invited by the good people at 2dartist to do this tutorial and make an illustration based around the theme 'The Alchemist's Workshop'. I liked the idea of the alchemist being somewhere between a wizard and a scientist, but properly rooted in fantasy, so I built the illustration around those themes.

For techniques, I have a few worth sharing. Apart from the basic build up that you see in the tutorial, one of the more useful ones is how to keep lines clean. For the rougher parts of an image I will use the Lasso tool to carve out the edges, much like you would use a stencil, but more often than not on an inverse. For the parts that demand more control, I use the Pen tool, and then use the option to turn the pen path into a selection.

Another technique I use often is to keep separate subjects of the painting clean within their own silhouettes by filling in the drawn silhouette after the line art stage, and then adding each progressive layer on top, attaching them as a Clipping Mask, thereby keeping the silhouette as clean as possible. This works for anything from hard- to soft-edge objects.

01 **Working out the thumbnails:** This is where I usually do more work in my head than on the page, and try to figure out what I want for the illustration.

For this one, I want the alchemist to be a wise old scholar, doing the mystical work of potions and alchemical mixtures. I also know I want him to have a goblin servant, or butler, because this will put him into the realm of fantasy and will also help illustrate the character a little.

I try both a vertical and a horizontal approach, and find the latter to work best for me.

"I try to be as uncomplicated as possible when it comes to brushes. I have a few Chalk and Speckle brushes I use for effect"

02 **Line art:** This is where figuring out the look of the character starts out. I want it to have nice layering and a few details.

I start putting down some instructional marks for myself on the background. I only eyeball the



01



02

perspective here, as the background is going to be pretty much a single facade rather than a complex perspective challenge, so there are a few cheats later on to make the flaws less obvious. Personally this is my favorite bit, as I come from drawing more than from painting, and this, more than anything else, is where I get to play.

For drawing in Photoshop you need patience, and a basic Round brush adjusted so that it responds in the way you want. Photoshop is much better for painting than for drawing, as it tends to leave jagged lines from time to time, even if the Anti-Alias is on. However, it is not so bad that you cannot get used to it and overcome it that way. If that is too tall an order, using a program like Sketchbook Pro will give nice clean lines.

03 **The color palette:** I begin putting down a very basic palette, finding a general theme. In this step I would usually have done quite a few iterations, but in this case I have a good idea of the base palette I want.

Using the Color Balance adjustment layers, you can get a lot of freedom to play around with the colors until you get something you really enjoy.

I try to be as uncomplicated as possible when it comes to brushes. I have a few Chalk and Speckle brushes I use for effect. To really get interesting results I usually go with large brushstrokes and an open mind.



03

04 **Manipulating shapes:** I start pushing the shadows in using a Multiply layer and then lay down in light with a Color Dodge layer, just to start getting a sense of the light in the scene. All this is still done under the line art that I want to keep on until I have all my basic elements in place, then I can start rendering.

01 **Thumbnails are a good tool to see if your idea will work well or if it needs some rethinking**

02 **Line art is great for getting details indicated before you go in and paint**

05 **Rendering:** At this point I have more or less what I want, so it's time to make it pretty. Painting on a normal layer, I render out the forms of the figures using the Lasso tool and pen to maintain clean lines, making sure to use rather large brush strokes within the selection for interesting effects. ▶

03 **Using Color Adjustment layers give you the freedom to experiment with different color palettes**

04 **You can apply the first sense of light in the scene with a Color Dodge layer**



04

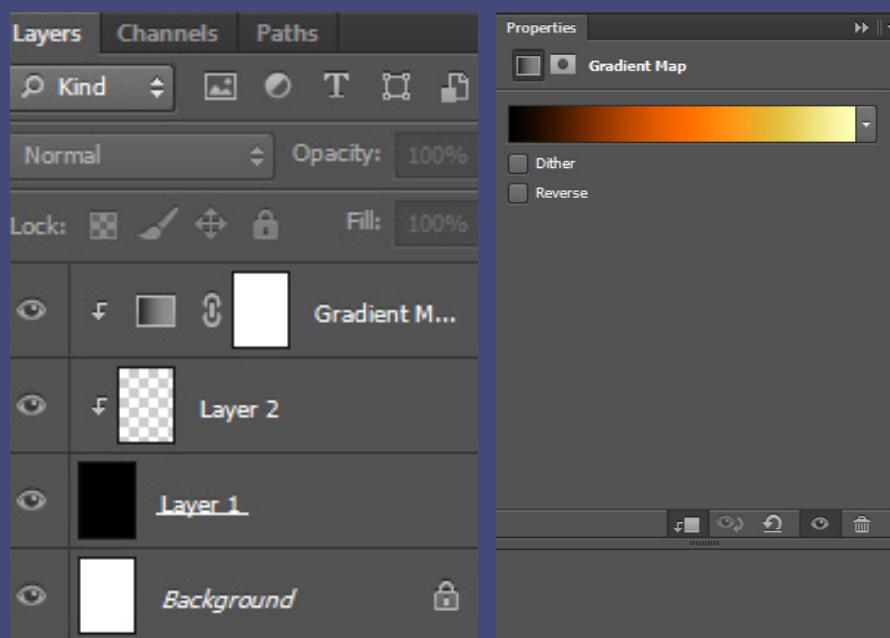


05

⚡ PRO TIP

Gradient mapping

The candle flames and light were painted using a technique developed by Mathias Verhasselt. As seen here, the layers are set up so that the gradient map and a normal layer are clipped onto a blacked-out screen layer using the Clipping Mask option. The gradient map in this case looks like the second image here. When painting in the Normal layer, the relevant value will translate into the color that has the same value on the gradient map, and so makes painting things like fire quite a bit easier.





06

“I will often step away from the piece for a day or two and try my best to not think about it, and then come back to it and make an intuitive choice later on”

When doing any illustration, there will most likely be a few elements that will be more difficult than others. To tackle these, I usually research some studies that cover the same kinds of problems. In a study sourced from the *Lord of the Rings*, I'm able to work with somewhat a similar palette as used here, and get a sense of how I want to treat the textures of the skin and hair.

06 Tinkering: In these last stages I work out the details and go in and lose some of the sharp edges in the background, as well as apply some adjustment layers to fine-tune the color balance and the contrast and brightness. I usually spend a stupid amount of time doing this because at this point in the process I have become quite blind to the image itself, and have a hard time seeing which iteration looks best. To help with this, I will often step away from the piece for a day or two and try my best to not think about it, and then come back to it and make an intuitive choice later on.

07 Final details: At this point I really allow myself to play with as many adjustment layers as I care to. To lose edges I use a mix between Blur filters, Smudge tool and the Soft brush. I have very few hard and fast rules here, except: 'Whatever looks the coolest, wins'. ●

05 It's useful to refine the shape of the figures using the Lasso tool and pen

06 Using adjustment layers helps to tweak the sharper areas, color balance, contrast and brightness



The Artist



Even Mehl Amundsen

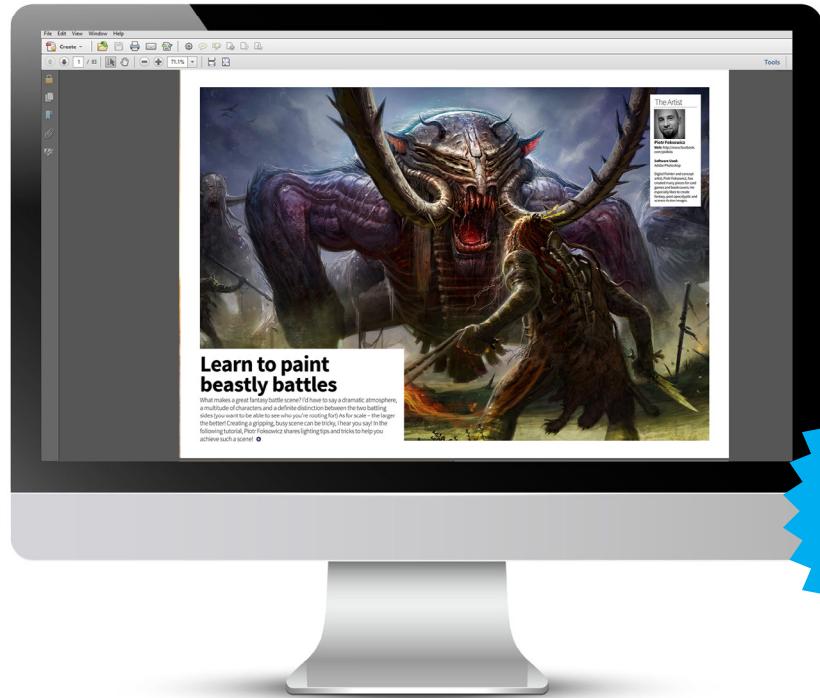
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Techniques for painting fire

Markus Lovadina demonstrates how to create your own custom brushes for fire, sparks and smoke and how to use it in a speed concept in the following step-by-step tutorial. 





The Artist



Markus Lovadina
malosart.blogspot.co.uk

Software Used:
Photoshop

Malo is currently working as a senior concept artist, as well as a freelance concept artist/illustrator for the videogame and movie industries.

Learn how to create custom brushes for fire elements and use them in your concepts.

This tutorial will guide you through the process of creating your own customized brushes both from scratch and also from a photo. These photos could be your own or, as in this tutorial, downloaded from an image stock library such as www.cgtextures.com. For some brushes I'd like to recommend the use of photos – but this really depends on the amount of detail and the realism you'd like to receive in your painting.

Later on in the tutorial, I will show you how to use these newly made brushes in a speed-painting for a fictional fantasy-orientated movie frame. The scene is set up on a battlefield with some sort of hero as a focus point. The Smoke, Fire and Spark brushes will be used to set up the right atmosphere and give a bit of a visual effect to the scene. I think it's quite important to tell a story in each image you paint – otherwise you have just a nice image.

To show how efficient customized brushes can be, I set my time frame for the image to about one-and-a-half hours. This gives you a guide for how such brushes can speed up your process. Sometimes you have to provide a quick idea to your lead or art director and that means you don't have tons of time. Enjoy making your brushes and developing ideas!

01 **Creating a Spark brush:** Let's start with a simple brush. I create a new document (about 850 x 850 pixels) with a white background, then I create a new layer on top of the BG layer. The Spark brush itself is made out of randomly placed dots with a normal Round brush. The brush is set to transparency mode and size.

One of the important things is the different black value for the brush. While black is pure opaque, white will be more transparent.



After the dots are placed randomly, I use a layer mask to mask out the outer edges of the image. If you don't do that, you'll get some cut-off edges/sparks, which will not look natural at all. When you're done, select New Brush from the menu.

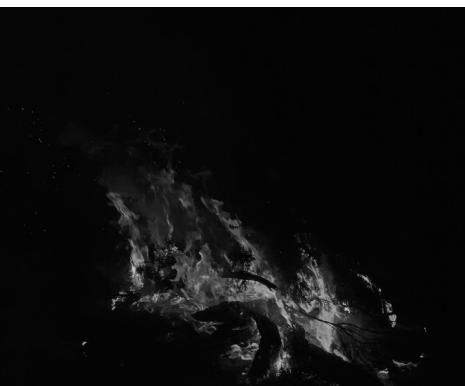
02 **Creating a Fire brush:** Now for a more complex brush. If you need a brush with lots of detail and an almost realistic feel, it is a good idea to use a photo as a base. For this brush I download an image from www.cgtextures.com, but feel free to make your own photos from your own campfire experiences, or simply browse the internet for inspiration.

I open the file and the first thing I do is convert the image into a gray-value image (Ctrl+U). As said before, you should always keep in mind that

black is absolutely opaque and the brighter it gets, the more transparent the brush will be.

The next step is to invert the image (Ctrl+I) so the black will be white, and vice-versa. Now you'll get a soft and mostly light-gray image. This could work, but you have to increase the values. Press Ctrl+L and move the small arrow under the black (left) towards the right side and the white (right arrow) a bit to the left side. Play around until you get a nice high contrast image, then save your Fire brush. The same process will work for the Smoke brush or any other brush you'll need later on.

03 **Rough color blocking:** It's time to set up the scene for the custom brushes. As mentioned in the introduction, the painting will be about some sort of hero on a burning

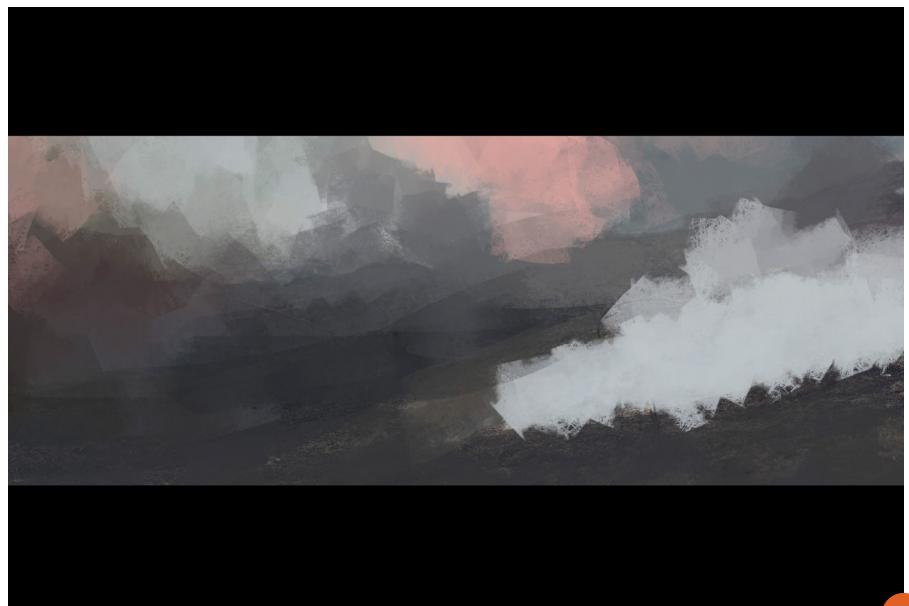


battlefield, and it should be a movie frame. With that in mind, I create a new document with a 16:9 feel. I already know that the earth is burned and that the fight is still going on, so the choice of colors is more towards gray and brown, as well as some red and orange tones. I don't focus on details right now; just on the initial shapes, forms, perspective and angle of the shot.

04 **Still working on the composition:** In this step I keep working on the composition and the angle of the shot. This may change later on when more details are added, but for now it will be a good start. As in the previous step, I keep on blocking in rough colors with a square-ish textured brush. The texture could give some happy accidents and lead to some nice ideas too.

I also start to paint in some trees and bushes to give the feel of a battlefield to the image. The brushes are made the same way as I mentioned before. This is again a good example on how useful such brushes are. Instead of painting a whole tree or brush, simply select the brush, click – and you're done!

05 **The first fire:** It's now time for the first fire on the battlefield. I create a new layer and select the new Fire brush I made before. The ▶



- 01** Play around with different settings in the brush palette – you'll be astounded how many results you'll get from one brush
- 02** This workflow could be applied to any other brush you need in the future – just make sure you get some nice high contrast, but still some soft gradient for interesting details
- 03** Don't worry about details in this phase of the painting. Now it's all about composition and colors
- 04** Even at an early stage of the painting the customized brushes will be very helpful and accelerative



03

04

color I choose is darker but still a bright orange. Based on the shape of the brush, I place the fire on the bottom-left corner. I then create a new layer, change the color to red, set the layer mode to Color Dodge and paint over the orange flames.

Due to the Color Dodge effect, I get some real fire effects with a soft gradient between orange, red and yellow. Now you can see the benefit of using a photo as a base for the brush – all the lovely details you can achieve.

06 Adding more fire and a knight: I keep adding fire to the painting in the same way as before. If you'd like to get some more variety to the flames and fire, it's a good idea to keep all the single fire-strokes on a single layer. This will give you the freedom to place and transform them randomly.

For the big fire on the horizon, I duplicate the first two fire layers, merge them and set the layer to Color Dodge. The result I get is way too bright, so I reduce the transparency of the layer. After that, I duplicate the layer and add a vertical Motion Blur effect (about 150-250) to the layer.

Since I've been collecting my own customized brushes for quite a while, painting the knight shape was no problem at all. The banners in the background are made with a squeezed Round brush, and the bright area on the left side is smoothed with the Smudge tool. For the Smudge tool, I use the Fire brush with different Scatter, Transparency and Texture settings.

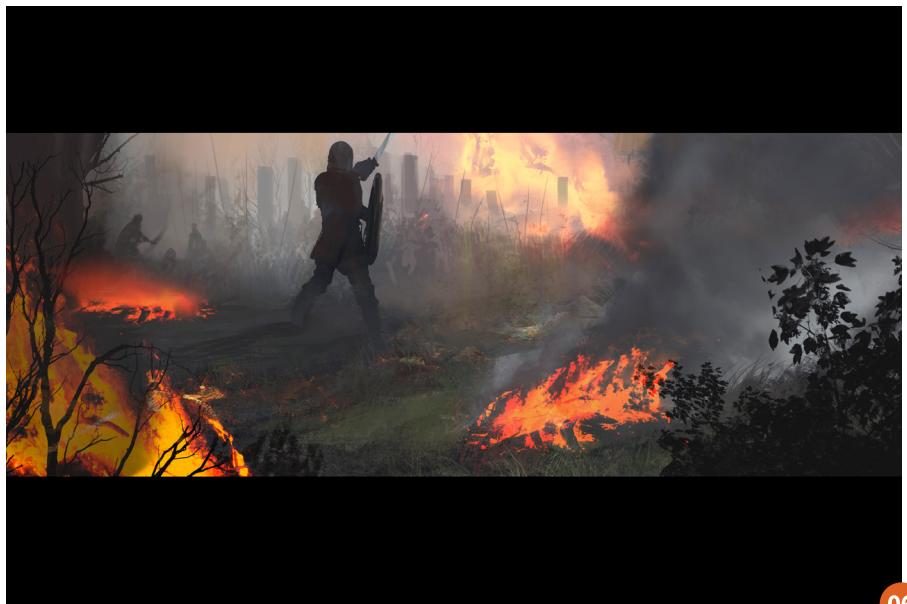
07 More smoke and fire: For the next step I tilt the image to get a more dynamic feel and add some more fire effects to the background. You could always reuse the layers you have made before – I keep most of my layers until the very end of an image. This allows me to go back and forth while painting, but more importantly – I'm able to reuse all of the elements that are already in the image.

I smooth the fire on the right-hand side the same way as before – with the Smudge tool. Then I create a new layer and paint in some smoke clouds with the brush I made alongside the Spark and Fire brush. I choose a darker blue-ish gray at first, and a lighter gray secondly. Those two smoke layers are blended together by reducing the layer's transparency.

08 Details and more details: I'm quite happy with the overall look so I start to add more detail to the knight. The details are mostly painted with a squeezed Round and a normal Round brush on separate layers.



05



06



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It's also time for me to use the Spark brush I made at the very beginning. I paint the sparks randomly on a new layer, and then I create another new layer, increase the size of the Spark brush and paint some bigger sparks on top of the smaller ones. After that, I reduce the layer transparency to about 60-70% and add a Gaussian Blur effect (about 3-5). With the Round brush I then add some more silhouettes of knights and enemies to the background.

09 Color changes and depth: Another way to add more mood and atmosphere to a concept piece is using the Color Balance tool and the Photo Filter. I'm quite happy with the look of the image, so I decide to make some color changes with the earlier mentioned layer effect. The good thing about these effects is that you're always able to go back and forth and, if needed, duplicate the effects and see if it will add a nice touch to the image.

I also add some big blades of grass to the foreground. These blades are giving a bigger sense of depth to the images, which is quite important for the composition.

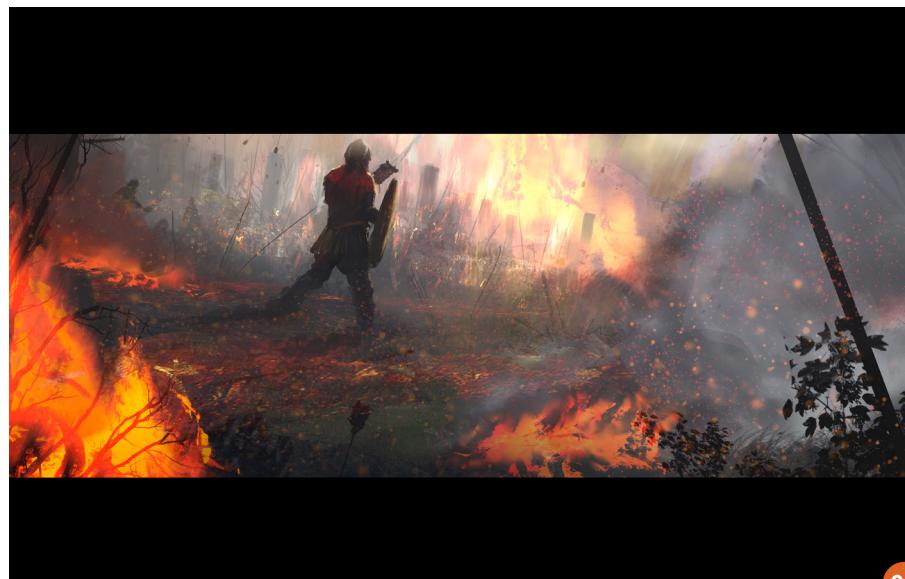
10 Final touches: Since I set my time frame to one-and-a-half hours, it's now time to add the final touches. I duplicate all the layers and merge them. I flip the canvas a few times to get a fresh view on the image and decide to move the whole image downwards, so I'm able to show more of the burning sky. The camera angle also feels a bit more dynamic and dramatic.

This concept is not a highly detailed illustration or a final concept piece. It's a rough idea that could be pitched to the lead or art director. If you get the go ahead, you could spend a lot more time adding details and changing things. This image is mainly meant to show you the advantage of using customized brushes in a daily workflow, and how you can speed up your process for developing rough ideas. ●

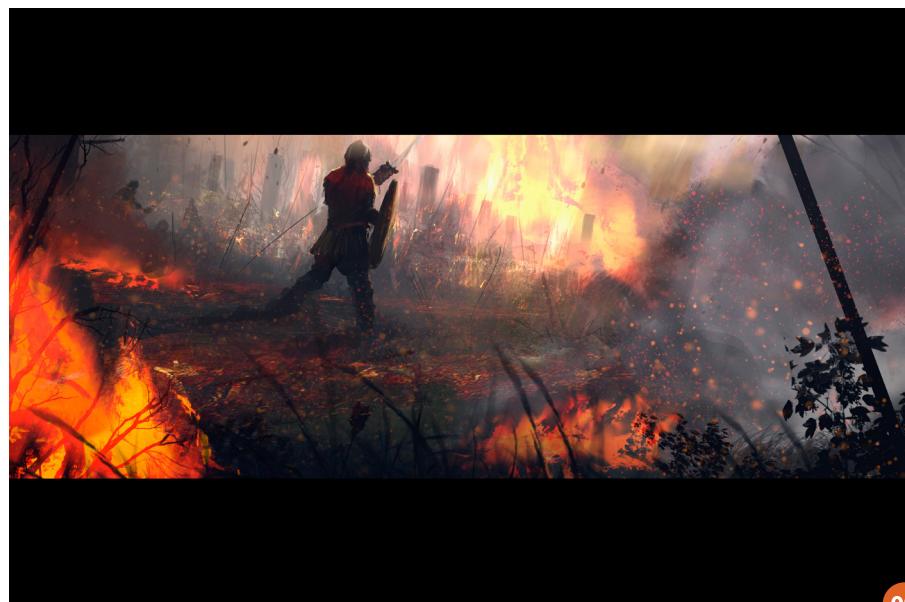
PRO TIP

Create as many brushes as you'd like to

Customized brushes are not only a highly effective way to speed up the entire painting process, they are also good for simulating different painting techniques like oil, gauché or acrylic. It is very important in my opinion to play around with brushes and different techniques to raise your artistic skill level. Also try to analyze old master's paintings and find out what kind of brushes they might have used, or what makes any particular brush pop out compared to other ones. Believe me – this will be an interesting journey.



08



09

05 With the new brush you'll get lots of details without having to paint all the flames and sparks yourself

06 A brush is not only a brush; you can also use it for tools like the Eraser or the Smudge tool

07 When you paint details for a while, don't forget to keep the image as a whole in mind – zoom out, flip the canvas or look at something else. This will help you get a fresh view on the image

08 Sparks are a good way to add depth and atmosphere to the image. It also adds a feel of heat to the concept. It's all about mood, isn't it?

09 Changing color using Color Balance or the photo filter is an easy way to bring your concept to the next level. Colors are absolutely important for the mood!

10 Customized brushes can be used for illustrating rough ideas and inspiring highly detailed illustration. They can also be used to get some nice textures for your painting

The Artist



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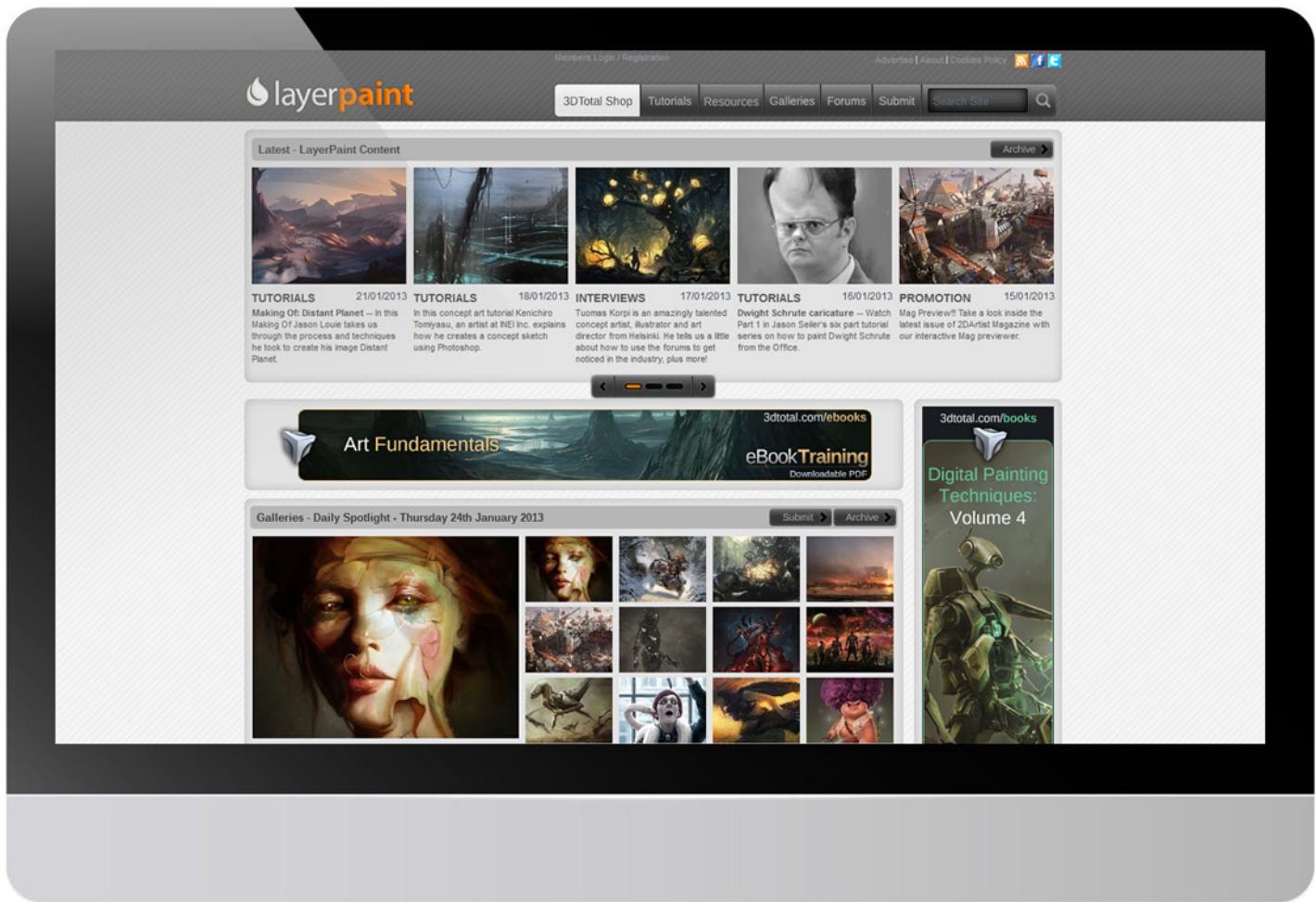
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The Artist



Clonerh Kimura
clonerh.deviantart.com

Software Used:
Photoshop

Clonerh Kimura is a freelance concept artist, character designer and occasional comic book colorist. He lives in Mexico City and has been working in the animation and videogame industry for the last six years.



Learn to paint mecha girls

Clonerh Kimura shares the techniques he used for creating his image *Anna*. As Clonerh takes you through his character designing process he reveals tips and tricks for adding definition, color and lighting effects! 

Discover Clonerh Kimura's techniques for painting cool sci-fi characters...

I'm glad to be writing this making of, mainly because this is the last piece that I worked on and it's also one of my favorites – up until now at least. I think that it's a normal feeling though, since it's part of the learning process that every new piece is better than the last, technically speaking.

I have to say this is one of the pieces that has taken me the longest to do. I started this illustration at the end of 2013 and I finished it just a few weeks ago, and not because it was too complicated but because I didn't have the motivation nor inspiration to finish it. I've been having a creative block for more than a year, and since then every new image has been a torture to finish. Little by little I've been recovering the inspiration and the urge to create a lot of new stuff, and this piece is evidence of that.

In this making of article I will be explaining the general process that I followed to make this piece. The real process is too long, and although I would like to make a tutorial with

really detailed steps, it would take up a lot of paper and would probably be too boring to read. So I hope many of you will find this project overview useful and maybe you can find a little inspiration in it.

01 **The idea:** The idea for this illustration was to make it as simple as possible. I have gotten accustomed to filling each scene with a lot of elements, especially the characters, but I wanted something different with this character. I wanted a character that felt light despite having those huge mechanical arms. As a matter of fact for the clothes, I wanted the plainest outfit that I could find.

That's how I started this piece, with a simple idea, but to be honest with you I don't usually keep my original idea, I end up with something completely different. In this case though, I had a clear idea and I made an effort to keep it that way.

Something important that has helped me a lot during the process of my illustration is that I look for references for almost everything I do. That was the initial step. I collected a lot of pictures and I took some of the elements that would work for my piece from each one. I'm not a good line artist so in my case references are very useful.

It was then time to define the pose. This is one of the easiest and most creative parts in the process – that's why it is one of the most important. Normally, I try to make as many gestures as possible until I find the one I like the most. In this case it wasn't that hard since I had a very clear idea in mind, so I just did one simple and fast drawing. And if for any reason the position of the arms or legs weren't to the best of my liking, I could make a change later – that's why I didn't worry too much at that point.

02 **Adding definition:** The advantage of working digitally is that you can modify many things without losing a great deal of time, but in any case it is better to have a clear idea from the beginning.

Before going forward, I worked a little more on the clothes and head without adding too many details because I define a lot of those things later on in the process. ▶

01 **The initial line sketch to capture and define the pose**

02 **Working on the clothes and head to get a clearer idea of the character**



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"You need to think about the final result that you want to achieve and what the purpose of your piece is, before considering the level of detail you want to include"

03 **Light and shadow:** The next step is where I take the most time, and it is where I put everything that I know about lighting into effect. A quick piece of advice for anyone who wants to work as an illustrator or concept artist is to at least learn the fundamentals of lighting. Trust me, the time you invest learning it will be worth it.

The process of adding lights and shadows is something that I did totally in grayscale, partially to save time but principally because it's easier to notice how much volume and depth you are giving your character.

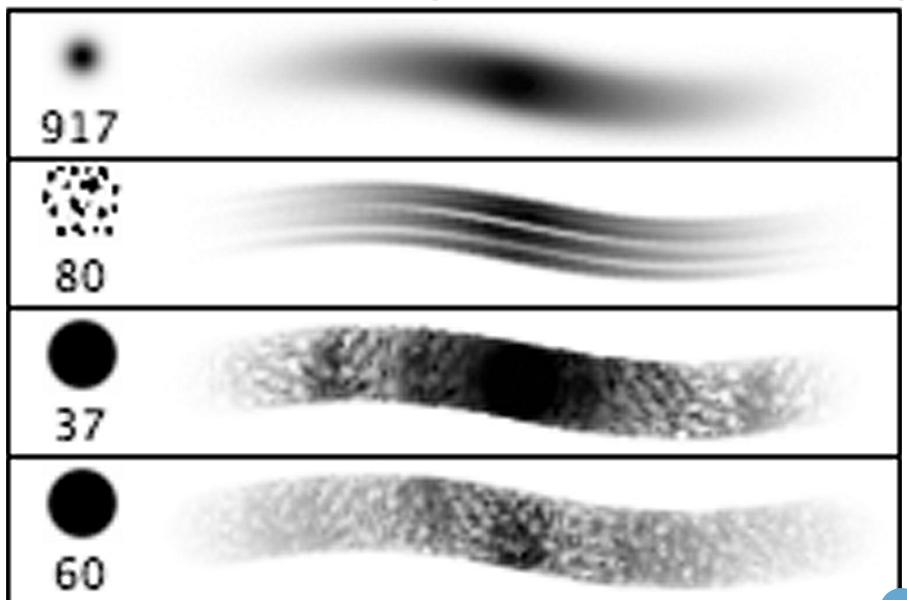
04 **The background:** I then added the background – just a solid and dark color to keep the focus on the character. I added the lights in the background to play with the transparency in her dress and also to add some lighting effects.

05 **Color:** One of the steps where I had the most fun, in my opinion, was adding the first layer of color. I basically created a new layer in Overlay mode; that way I could start adding color fast, and could even make all the color tests that were necessary.

I like putting a lot of emphasis on the skin hues. I normally only use up to five different hues to



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create the skin color; that can sound like a bit much, but this will define how natural the skin looks. In this case I used pink, yellow, green, blue and gray. Ambient lighting also affects the hues that you can use in the skin.

With the clothes, I still wasn't sure how the lighting would affect the color on the dress so I decided to leave some neutral colors to modify them later.

06 **Brushes:** The next step is where everyone's results will vary. I like to feel that the lighting is smooth and natural, that's why I don't need to invest a lot of time adding details.

I don't think it's necessary to add a lot of detail to any single piece. For example, when I make



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some concepts or character designs for work, I have a deadline to finish the illustration so I have to consider this before I think about adding many details into the illustrations. You need to think about the final result that you want to achieve and what the purpose of your piece is, before you can consider the level of detail that you will want to include.

The first thing that I'm going to need at this point is references – mainly to add lighting to the face. The second thing I need is brushes. For some pieces I use a lot of brushes, but in this case I only used these four pictured. The third brush is the brush that I use to add texture to the skin and for the metal parts.

07 **Detailing the face:** In most of my illustrations I start with the face – for me it's the most important part of the character. Sometimes managing to make an expression that will convince people that it's a live character with a story can take a lot of time, and many times I can't even achieve that. That's why the face is one of the areas where I spend the most time. I make all the necessary adjustments until I get a convincing result.

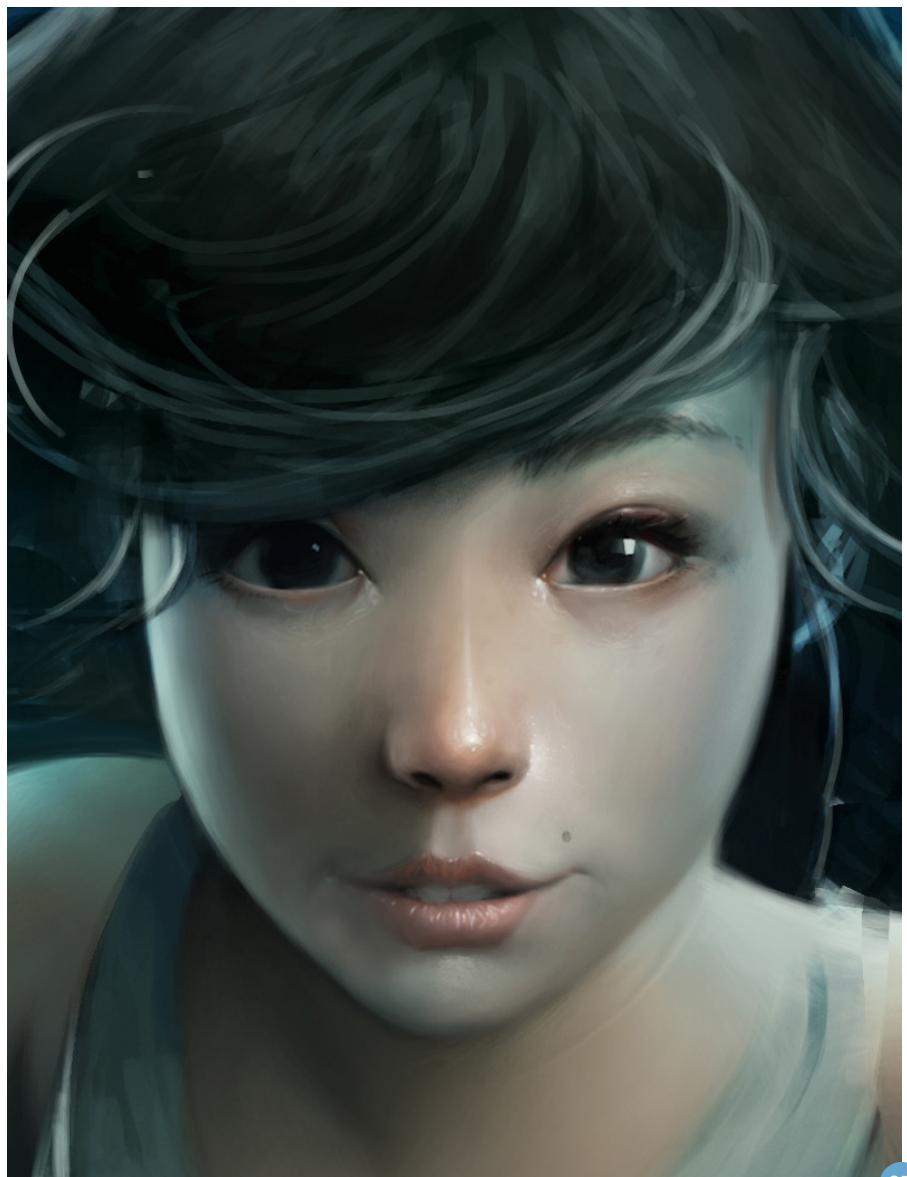
A curious detail concerning this piece: the eyes are the only part in the entire illustration that I never touched after adding the lights and shadows. Once I had finished with the face I continued detailing the skin of the character.

08 **The clothing:** The next part I focused on was the clothes. In step 03, I added some basic folds, but unfortunately the movement and the falling of the dress didn't seem natural.

First I tried to find some references for the folds but I couldn't find anything useful, so I decided to make them without references. With a little practice it can be easy to add the folds – the real problem is placing the lights, casting the shadows correctly and making sure it looks natural. If you have some experience in lighting it shouldn't be difficult but if not, it's better to use references.

Unfortunately a detail that is not easy to notice is the shoes. In the image here, you can see a close up of the detail on her shoes.

09 **Detailing the arms:** The mechanical arms were another difficult part. First of all, because it was the only thing that breaks the ▶



07

03 Defining the lighting on the character in grayscale

04 Adding a background and lighting sources to the scene

05 Working in the first layer of color in Overlay mode

06 The four brushes used to create the image

07 Refining the detail on the face – it's one of the key areas that create a convincing character

08 Working out the folds in the clothing fabric and refining the detail on her shoes



08

illustration, since it doesn't seem to be part of the character itself and I had to do everything possible to make the character look comfortable wearing them. The other problem was making those arms look functional and with a real purpose, but that last part wasn't very important as long as they looked good.

I started by making a clean base without textures, only light and shadow. With the base ready, I added the backlight and some aging marks and scratches to make them look like they've been worn. These are only details to make them look visually better, but they also help to add a background story to our character.

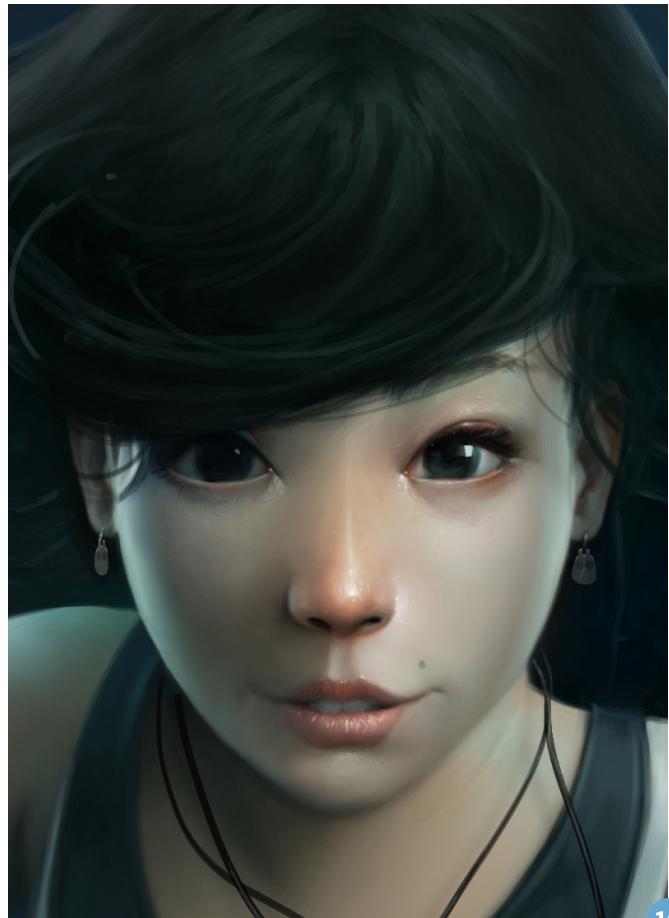
10 Extra details: I was then very close to the final result of the character which was almost totally done. This image shows close ups to some extra details that I added. Some of those are personal references but others are references to Japanese anime – I'm sure that some of you will recognize some of them. I also added more detail to her face just to make the character exactly like I wanted it.

11 Altering the background: The only thing that I didn't like was the background, despite not wanting anything complicated. The truth is that at this point it looked terrible. So I decided to make the background again, adding some lighting effects which I will quickly try to explain.

First I started with a dark background and added white lines over it – these were basically the spotlight with a Hard brush. Over those lines I added the halo of light with a blue and Smooth brush in Screen mode. To those ugly lines I added a Motion Blur to make them lose definition, and then added a Gaussian blur. Finally, I pasted a texture of dirty glass in black-and-white over a layer in Color Dodge mode, which gave the effect of a dirty lens.



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“With experience and practice I managed to simplify a lot of processes to get a good result in a short amount of time”

12 **Final touches:** The piece was then done, so it wasn't necessary to add anything else to our character or the background. I just added some final touches. I added a bit of blur in some areas and modified the levels and contrast a little, because the picture looked a bit opaque.

I'm not sure how many hours I had invested on this illustration but they were surely less than you'd imagine – with experience and practice I

managed to simplify a lot of processes to get a good result in a short amount of time. With all of that said and done though, I'm still looking to improve my skills and trying to learn something new every day. ●

09 Adding some lighting and aging marks to the arms create a background story

10 Some of the extra details added to the character in the final stages

11 Refining the background more by adding dynamic lighting effects

11



The Artist

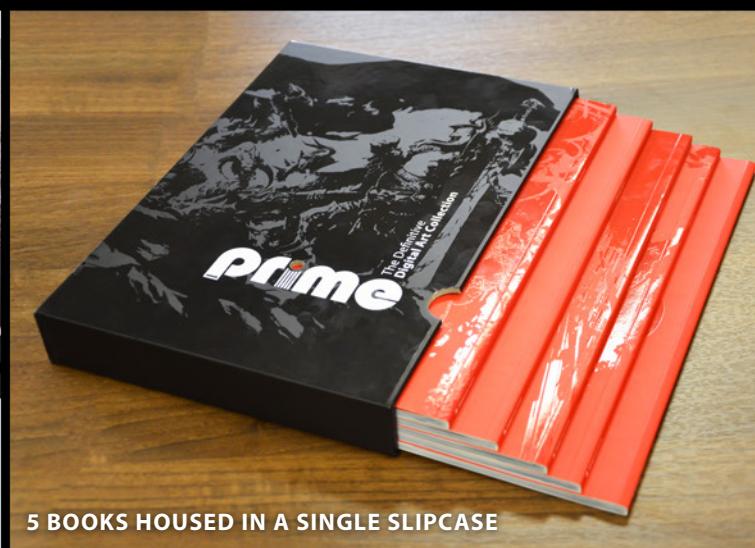


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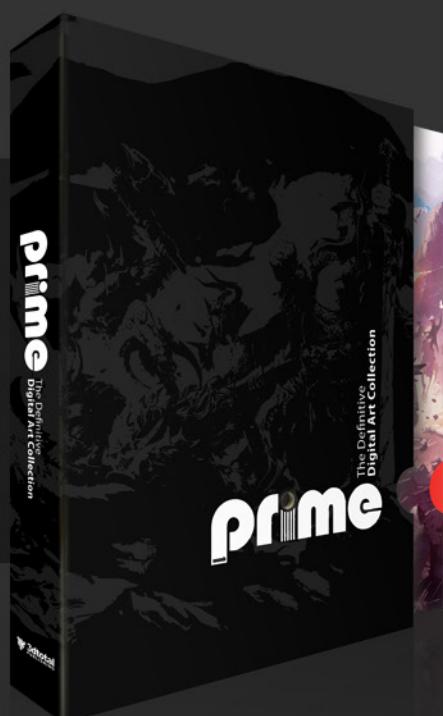
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The Artist



Serge Birault
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Software Used:
Photoshop

Bio:

Freelance illustrator Serge Birault is well known for his perfectly painted pin-ups. Since releasing his first Art Of book last year, he has been working on several images and won many new awards for his top-quality work.

DIGITAL ART MASTER:

Alexandra Potter and Tentacle

by Serge Birault

Master of pin-up girls, Serge Birault shares his unique and instantly recognizable style with us, as he demonstrates how he painted his image *Alexandra Potter and Tentacle!* ►





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Introduction

Strangely, I don't like painting robots. I'm a fan of Hajime Sorayama and I like painting metal, plastic and shiny stuff, but robots hold little interest for me. When I saw some photos of Alexandra Potter wearing a white, latex robot suit it inspired me to make a 'techno' image and give robots a try.

Alexandra is a model from Cologne who wears ballet heels, which would seem impossible to walk in but somehow she can. George Petty, who painted pin-ups in ballet shoes, also inspired this work, particularly the pose.

Sketch

I worked on an A3 format canvas at 300 dpi. When working at such a large scale, you need to be precise. I work in quite a chaotic way and I did my sketch very quickly. I focused on the composition, which is quite simple and, as I mentioned before, inspired by George Petty.

The face

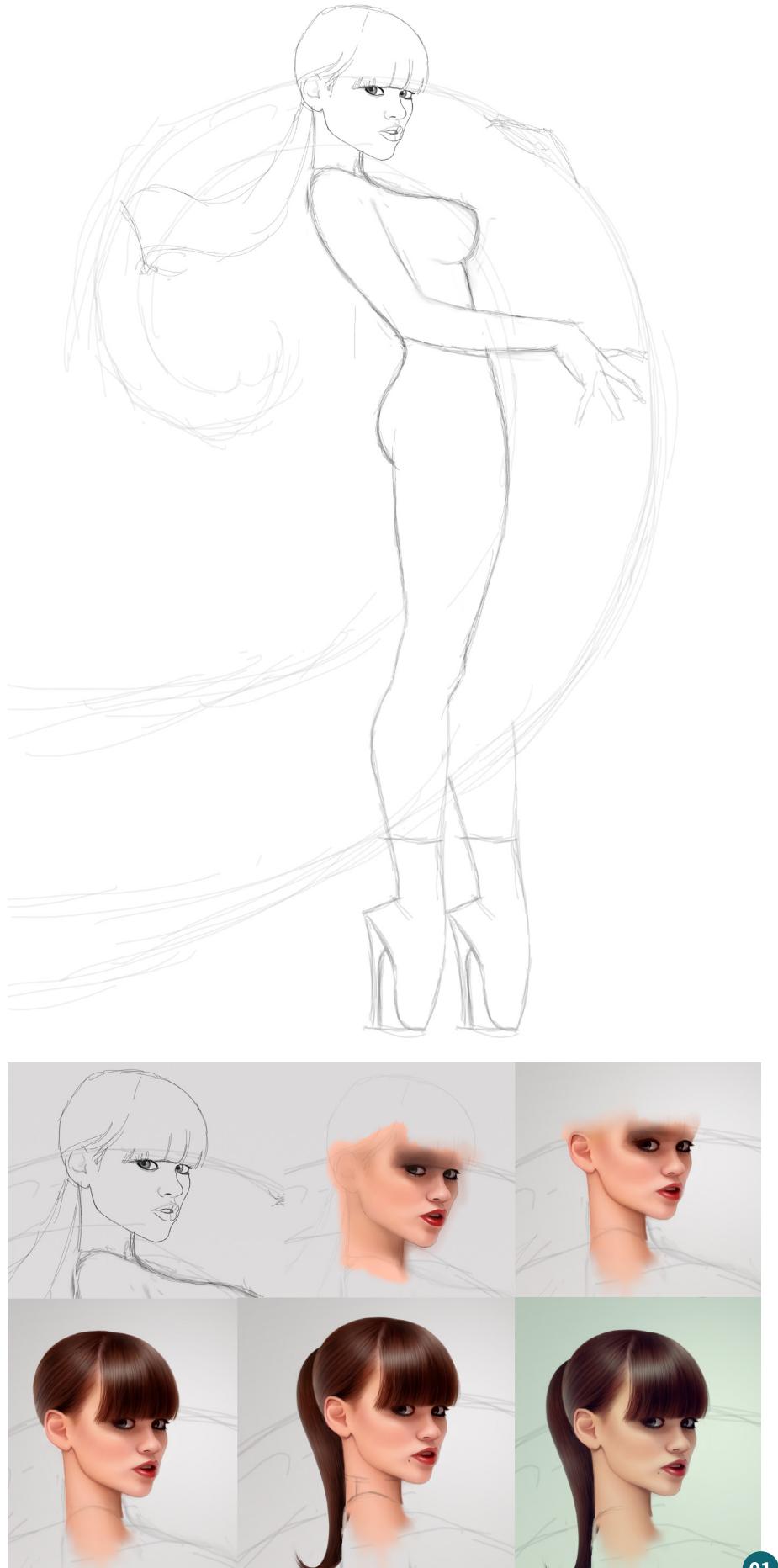
I searched for photo references of Alexandra's face. I usually work with strong light and contrast, but for this image I was influenced by my friend Hubert de Lartigue, the French airbrush artist. He works with very soft lights and very interesting tones and I wanted to emulate this.

My technique is always the same: I begin by putting my sketch on a Multiply layer and decreasing the opacity. I then create a flat area tinted with basic flesh tones on a layer under the sketch. I add more layers above this one, creating volume with the Soft Round brush at a very low opacity (Fig.01).

The Soft Round brush is great for creating gradients and soft blending, especially if you work at a very low opacity (0-20%), making it easy to obtain smooth results.

My palette was very basic. I first chose a background color that would work as an ambient light and then next I chose my skin tones. Realistic flesh needs more than two colors and a single gradient. I added a little bit of yellow on the brightest tones and a bit of red on the darkest.

The most difficult thing to deal with when you want to achieve a realistic rendering is the



"For this image I was influenced by my friend Hubert de Lartigue, the French airbrush artist. He works with very soft lights and very interesting tones and I wanted to emulate this"



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contrast, which isn't easy with soft lighting. Finding a good balance is something that can take time.

The hair looks quite simple, but it was very time-consuming. To create a convincing result, I used quite a large palette again, adding yellow, red, green and other colors that you wouldn't expect. Each hair was painted individually; when doing this it's important that you always use the same sized brush. I then painted the reflections on a separate layer using the Soft Round brush with a low opacity.

The body

As I said, I wasn't sure of the pose so I tried different things. Latex is not too difficult to paint; you just have to be organized and work in logical steps. On the first layer, I simply painted the whole body in black and I added the details on different layers, painting in the reflections using the background color and white (Fig.02).

Once again, the contrast is the biggest problem. Some of the gradients are very light. As the light is soft, the latex doesn't have to be too shiny. There's no formula for painting latex and vinyl, but you have to define your volumes first and then you can create the reflections.

Alexandra told me that her feet needed to be taller, so I made some corrections (Fig.03). The final silhouette is thinner than I had in mind and I made changes to the proportions several times.

To add more interesting colors, I created several layers on top for adjustments, including a fully painted blue layer with a low opacity (Fig.04).



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The tentacle

Adjusting the size of all the different parts of the tentacle was quite difficult. Next time, I will use 3D software to do the sketch. It doesn't look too complicated, but believe me, I spent a lot of time on this part.

I duplicated the first white part several times in order to fix the shape, after which I did a lot of

copy and pasting, before painting the light and reflections over each part (Fig.05). This was quite boring, but I think the final 3D-style tentacle isn't so bad (Fig.06).

The white plastic had to reflect the environment, so I added the background color to my palette and painted the gradients with the Soft airbrush.

The adjustments

I kept my adjustment layers on the top and just changed the opacity of some of them. Finally, I merged all of my layers, fixed a few things and then I was finished (Fig.07). Alexandra liked the picture, so I had done my job.



The Artist



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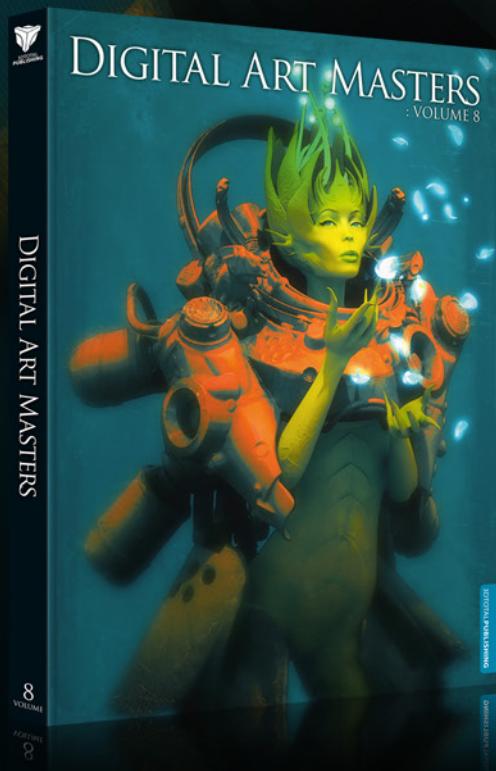
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